**CAPE BRETON UNIVERSITY**

**SENATE**

**Special Senate Budget Meeting - Pre-Budget Recommendations**

**Agenda**

**Friday, January 17, 2025**

**1:30 - 4:00 p.m. CE339**

1) Roll Call, Declaration of Quorum and Land Acknowledgement

2) Pre-Budget Recommendations:

    a. Expanding Research Capacity and Opportunities

    b. Website Development

    c. Improving CBU's Quality of Teaching and Learning

    d. Boardmore Playhouse

    e. Large Format Passenger Vans for Course Support

    f. Renovations for the Multiversity Room

3) Adjournment

Senate
**Planning and Review Committee Report**

Preamble – Summary of Planning and Review Committee Terms of Reference
The Planning and Review Committee shall: … 3) draft recommendations brief to become the pre-budget submission of Senate; ...

Observations
The committee sent out requests to faculty in August and again in September to develop our list of pre-budget recommendations to the Senate. Through October and November additional consultations and recommendations from other individuals and groups on campus informed the recommendations of the committee.

Recommendation
We ask that senate approve the 6 recommendations made in the pre-budget brief to senate, so that they become the pre-budget submission of Senate. Committee members supported all 6 of the recommendations unanimously (7-0).


# 1. Expanding Research Capacity and Opportunities


**Preamble:**
The landscape of higher education is evolving rapidly, presenting both challenges and opportunities for our university. As we navigate these changes, it is imperative that we bolster our research grant budget to meet the growing demands of our academic community and maintain our competitive edge. This expansion is necessitated by three key factors:
**Faculty Growth**: Our institution has experienced a significant increase in faculty numbers, reflecting our commitment to academic excellence and diverse expertise. To fully leverage this expanded intellectual capital, we must provide adequate research funding.
**Inflationary Pressures**: The rising costs associated with conducting high-quality research have outpaced general inflation. Equipment, materials, and operational expenses (e.g. student wages, where most RISE funds are targeted) have all seen substantial increases, necessitating a commensurate adjustment in our research budget.
**Student Engagement**: Creating research assistant positions for students is crucial for their academic and professional development. These opportunities not only enhance the university's research output but also provide invaluable hands-on experience for our future scholars and innovators. CBU's Academic Plan item 4.3 calls for "Increasing opportunities for student experience in research".
By addressing these factors through an increase in the RISE budget, we can:
1. Attract and retain top-tier faculty
2. Maintain the quality and scope of our research initiatives
3. Enhance student learning outcomes and career prospects
4. Strengthen our position as a research institution

While this cttee has not been able to obtain numbers from before 2017, members of those grant committees prior to 2017 have indicated that the success rate on the first round of applications

(Fall) was usually near 100% for those applications deemed worthy, and that there was enough money left over for a second round (Winter/Spring). Since 2017, there have been no second rounds, due to a lack of funds. While the number of successful applicants has remained steady (20-29) over the years, the percentage of successful applicants has dropped to slightly over 50% (2024), because of the lack of funds. The size of the pot since 2017 has varied from $130,000 (2020) to $207,000 (2023), with the other years falling somewhere in between.

RISE is not the only source of research funding, as external funding agencies exist which provide longer term and larger funds. Research publications arising from RISE funding can be used to help obtain external funds but competition is heavy with varying national success rates (SSHRC, 38%; NSERC, 57%; and CIHR, 17%). It is probable that CBU's success rate is smaller given it is a smaller university (no data available at this time). Past and current RISE cttees have used the past and projected applications for external grants in prioritizing RISE applications, reinforcing the act of applying for external funding, but heavy competition for tricouncil funding emphasizes the need for continued RISE support.

*Motion: That the university allocate additional funds to the RISE grant budget. This increase is essential to support faculty expansion, an inflation adjustment, and to increase student opportunities.*

## 2. Website Development

**Preamble**

Last year Senate approved the following prebudget recommendation:

CBU should engage in a reworking of the website and involve stakeholders in the direction of its construction. An employee with the skills necessary to manage and alter the website should be tasked with liaising with faculty and students on an ongoing basis.

It is unclear whether any significant change has occurred since then. Apparently CBU has 45 content editors across many departments, leading to significant challenges in maintaining brand tone and voice, accessibility, quality assurance across the website, and security. It leads to inconsistencies across the site, duplicated work/pages, and many missed opportunities to better provide service to the university community. We apparently operate in a reactive mode, instead of proactively. There is little opportunity to approach faculty/staff/students about working together on elements that would enhance the student experience. Some examples of missed opportunities (there are many more):
1) Many academic departments have expressed the desire to have a department specific web presence where they offer a showcase of student work, advice for students, faculty profiles, research news etc. At least one department has created their own website requiring a paid ISP to address this deficiency, despite adding to faculty workload.
2) A prebudget request made this year makes a solid case for a Ride Share website to serve staff, faculty, and students, something found at other universities. It would help

to reduce greenhouse gases, reduce the need for parking spaces, offer opportunities for those who have difficulty getting to campus, and reduce transportation costs.

3) When departments or units at CBU invest in specialized equipment, members of other units are rarely aware of these resources or how to access them. This can lead to duplication and under-utilization of some equipment. A 2023 Senate-approved prebudget recommendation was to create a digital lending platform, or "Library of Things" to facilitate the efficient use of resources. It has not happened.

After surveying faculty and librarians, some common complaints were: poor organization; navigation is problematic when looking for information on courses or certificates, employees etc.; the backend of intranet is not intuitive; the search function is hit and miss; the Compass advising portal is difficult to understand for both students and faculty.

As we all know, CBU is growing every day, for instance, we will have CBMC, the Cape Breton Medical Campus and it may have presence on the CBU website. The university needs in-house website development expertise to respond proactively to the evolution of the website, as well as a content editor/manager, a person dedicated to the maintenance of the website's security, content changes and creation, accessibility and quality assurance. Such a move should remove the need to contract out website maintenance and reduce the workload of many of those 45 content editors.

***Motion: That CBU invest in website development and editing expertise to ensure a proactive growth of our website to enhance the CBU.ca experience for both students and staff, offering services such as academic department presences and a Ride Share site.***

## 3. Improving CBU's Quality of Teaching and Learning

**Preamble**

Currently we are experiencing a global movement towards pedagogies that create more inclusive educational environments to meet the needs of diverse learners across educational institutions. One such approach is Universal Design for Learning (UDL). UDL promotes the design and delivery of flexible and accessible learning experiences for all leaners regardless of individual characteristics and abilities. Technology is a key in this. CTL whose mandate is that of promoting excellence in teaching and learning excellence demonstrates new technology in smart classrooms. Ideally, all classrooms should be smart classrooms to maximize inclusivity and accessibility. Transforming all classrooms at CBU into smart classrooms is the ultimate goal; in the meanwhile, discussions about the current availability of teaching technology, and accessibility options available in classrooms have been ongoing among CBU faculty. Updated classroom technology is not just a desire, but a necessity.

Keeping in mind budgetary concerns, the provision of ClickShare Conference and a transcription software in all classrooms represent important step in fostering UDL across CBU. ClickShare Conference is a wireless presentation system that can be used in the classroom with both Macs and PCs.  It allows instructors and students to share their screen to a projector, with a click of the button, allows students to engaging in collaborative learning presentations (several ClickShare buttons can be used, and presenters can simultaneously share their work), allows students to present their component of a presentation on a device with a USB drive and combining the

pieces together in the classroom without the need to do it before the presentation, and reduces time spent resolving technical issues that may accompany a presentation.

Audio Transcription Software increases inclusivity and accessibility by fostering multimodal learning; supporting diverse learning styles; promoting active listening; increasing student engagement; improving study and review; and supporting the needs of neurodiverse learners, learners with hearing issues, processing impairments, and speakers of English as an Additional Language.

CBU is currently the second largest campus in Nova Scotia and continues to expand. Strengthening inclusivity and accessibility in teaching and learning is a must for quality program delivery. Making ClickShare technology and transcription software in all CBU classrooms aligns with CBU's Strategic Plan's Commitment to 'Preparing students through quality teaching and programming to thrive in a changing world' and 'enriching the working environment and enhancing personal wellness' of CBU faculty.

*Motion: To increase the quality of teaching on campus, Cape Breton University provide investment to install the Clickshare meeting room system (or similar system) and live transcription in all classrooms.*


## 4. Boardmore Playhouse

**Preamble**

In 2019 CBU's senior administration established a task force to study the state of creative arts at CBU. The study was also supported in CBU's 2020 Academic Plan (article 2.4.6).  After four months of work, the task force submitted a Creative Arts Strategy with specific recommendations that focused on four main areas:
  - Student and campus life and the arts
  - Physical resources related to the arts at CBU
  - Creative Arts programming at CBU
  - Community-university relationships and agreements in the context of the arts

In the area of physical resources, a feasibility study for the Boardmore Playhouse was recommended. The feasibility study was commissioned in 2020 and completed in 2021.  As stated in the Novita Interpares Limited 2021 Feasibility Study," a renewal of the Boardmore Playhouse could unlock the potential for a significant expansion of the relationship between the university and the community and would act as a catalyst for social interaction, intellectual stimulation and opportunities for innovation and creativity not currently available through the Boardmore facility in its existing condition. Properly designed and appointed, the renewed Boardmore would become a desirable and welcoming destination in-itself, helping to fulfill the university's mandate to be "rooted in the community" while serving as an academic space for the university's arts-hub.

The Feasibility Study goes on to say that "in order to bring the Boardmore Playhouse up to standard, it will be necessary to construct the public lobby and backstage facilities that were not included in the original design. Also, as it is a 40-year-old facility, the Boardmore requires new building systems and production systems. There are four options for renewing the Boardmore Playhouse: 1. A new building on another site; 2. A new building on the existing site; 3.

Renovation of the existing building; and 4. Renovation of the existing building with addition of top floor."

It will likely be many years, if at all, before a new building, as described in the 2021 feasibility study, is built to house a university arts-hub. It is probably just as likely that extensive renovation (options 3 & 4) will not happen for the Boardmore Playhouse, in the near future.  In the meantime, however, the Boardmore Playhouse needs some attention if it is to continue to develop and produce programming that is consistent with the expectations of the Cape Breton and Campus communities. The Boardmore Theatre/Dramagroup is in its 53rd year of producing professional quality theatre productions, which has stood as a shining example of many of CBU's strategic goals.

Many faculty and staff are already engaged in creative activities both in the classroom and through membership in arts-based societies and groups. By providing opportunities within programs, on campus and within the community, we benefit from an untapped resource. Shared creative activities involving faculty, staff and students create a unique collegial experience. We must "ensure that physical, technical & human resources support all features of a growing CBU." (Strategy 6, SEM)

The Boardmore facility has had one significant upgrade to its house lighting system this past year. However, the playhouse still has its original seating, carpeted floors, stage decking, and much of its original theatre lighting system.  The playhouse is in need of new carpets, stage decking, doors, storage facilities, repairs to mechanical systems, upgraded production system, and renovations to its dressing room and green room areas.

***Motion:  Cape Breton University make a definitive decision on renewing the Boardmore Playhouse (option #3 above) and, depending on that decision, commit annual funding over the next five years, for renovations to the Boardmore Playhouse.***

## 5. Large Format Passenger Vans for Course Support

**Preamble:** Many programs at CBU either utilize—or would benefit from—educational activities at locations outside of the downtown campus. Actual (past) CBU examples include studying the complex geology of the Cabot Trail, visiting the CBRM's wastewater treatment facilities, observing traditional Cape Breton Celtic music sessions, collecting biological specimens from the Bras d'Or Lakes, or learning about public hygiene practices in action at the YMCA pool. These types of active learning experiences are an essential part of a quality education. They also promote wellness, foster belonging (through shared group experience), and provide 'uniquely Cape Breton' opportunities. That is, they support all of CBU's four strategic goals related to investing in our students (strategies 1.1-1.4). They also making learning exciting and enriching, strengthening recruitment and student retention (Strategy 2.4). At the same time, place-based research (Strategy 2.2) and collaboration with non-academic partners (Strategy 2.3) requires mobility; as do off-campus programs, such as the Gaelic Foundations at Beinn Mhàbu (Mabou). Meeting these important strategic goals requires the ability to move students and faculty across the Island and Maritimes more broadly.

While CBU owns a suite of small vans, these are not available for instructional or other faculty use during the warm parts of the year (spring/summer or first half of fall). In the past, faculty used carpooling, but this creates serious liability issues and is unfeasible in courses with high international enrolment (due to low car ownership). Some instructors have turned to taxis or transit, but these options are not viable for travel to many locations. Bus rentals are not economically feasible, especially for multiple lab sections or trips requiring overnight travel. As a result, many faculty have had to abandon or make these important learning experiences optional.

The new class of large format passenger vans, e.g., the 15 seat Ford Transit XL, hit a logistical sweet spot: they employ advanced safety features (e.g., canopy airbags), can be driven with a regular Class 5 licence, can access localities that are not viable for buses, and are capable of transporting an entire lab section (under many program caps). Access to these vans would allow CBU faculty to use the Island as their classroom, while also supporting local communities, and providing learning opportunities (e.g., Science Atlantic conferences) to students off Island. Support for this initiative comes from faculty across 5 Departments and 3 Schools.

***Motion: That Cape Breton University purchase one or more large capacity (15 seat) passenger vans for faculty use to support teaching, student research, conference travel, and other academic activities during the academic year and summer.***


## 6. Renovations for the Multiversity Room

Preamble: Originally designed to be a public art space, as CBU has expanded, and the community has created other spaces for artists and creatives, the Multiversity Room (MTVR) has moved beyond its original purpose by becoming a multi-use room. Without purpose, the MTVR has found various stakeholders within the university wanting to renovate it for its own need. Renovations were noted as a priority by the provost's working group.

Over the past several years, the MTVR has become a space used by the library, by various academic departments, and by different clubs and organizations to hold events for the public and university community. At the same time, with classroom space being increasingly limited, it has become a primary location for many classes despite not being designed for that purpose. To that end, the University has furnished the Multiversity Room with moveable desks, white boards, screens, audio-visual hardware, etc. which has allowed the space to be used by different groups but leaves each with some challenges. This has inspired different stakeholders to want renovations for the MTVR to serve their own needs more successfully.

For example, in our pre-budget call to the university community for recommendations this year, a proposal was spearheaded by the Department of Experiential Studies in Community and Sport (XCS) requesting renovations to the MTVR so that it can be better suited for its pedagogical needs in teaching over 300 students per year within the BACS degree program. Supported by the SASS Dean and other SASS departments, the proposal argued that specific upgrades are needed in the room to meet the pedagogical aims of the student-led, interactive, and experiential learning environment needed various programs' courses (e.g., theatre, music, sports and physical activity, psychology, sociology and community studies). This proposal recommended wall-mounted and

portable white boards, wall-mounted screens, accessible collaborative tables for group-work, improved lighting, and brighter wall colour, among other requests.

In our discussions, the Planning & Review committee acknowledged the need for renovations to the MTVR but noted that there have been different expressions of interest by various stakeholders in redesigning the room. In recognizing these competing interests, it believes that there needs to be some formal decision-making process to determine for what purpose, direction, and design the Multiversity Room should take before committing to renovations that will facilitate the needs of one group or another.

***Motion: That a committee be formed from members of interested departments, mandated with the purpose to determine the best use of the Multiversity Room and the necessary renovations to meet those needs, and that the budget include a line for such renovations.***