

Professional  
Program for  
Presidents



Programme  
professionnel  
pour les chefs  
d'établissement



## The Presidency in Practice: Insights, Skills and Strategies for Resilient Leadership

Sunday, January 11, 2026

All times in this program are in Eastern Time (ET)

3:00–3:30 p.m.  
Maple room

### How Universities Canada works for you

An opportunity for new presidents to learn more about how Universities Canada supports members, their institution and their teams, including the association's current priorities, strategic direction, advocacy and communications.

*Speakers:*

**Gabriel Miller**, President and CEO, Universities Canada

**Julia Scott**, Vice-President, Member Services, Universities Canada

**Michelle Coates-Mather**, Vice-President, Public Affairs, Universities Canada

3:30–4:30 p.m.  
Maple room

### Navigating the first year of the presidency

The first year as a university president sets the tone for the entire tenure. This session dives into the critical strategies and insights needed to thrive in Canada's complex higher education landscape. From building trust with your senior team and key stakeholders to managing institutional priorities while balancing personal resilience with professional demands, this session will support new members on how to lead with confidence and clarity from day one.

*Speaker:*

**Bonnie Patterson**, Executive Coach & Consultant, Higher Education Governance & Leadership

6:00–8:30 p.m.  
1 Hotel lobby

### Opening Reception and Dinner

1 Kitchen



Universities  
Canada. Universités  
Canada.

# Monday, January 12, 2026

All times in this program are in Eastern Time (ET)

**7:30–8:45 a.m.**  
**Harriet's rooftop**

## **Breakfast**

A buffet breakfast will be available from 7:30 a.m. onwards.

**9:00–9:15 a.m.**  
**Maple room**

## **Opening remarks**

Gabe Miller and Joy Johnson welcome members to the start of the official program and briefly set the context for the event.

*Speakers:*

**Gabriel Miller**, President and CEO, Universities Canada

**Joy Johnson**, President, Simon Fraser University

**9:15–10:45 a.m.**  
**Maple room**

## **Leadership and strategy in today's uncertainty**

A dynamic conversation on this defining moment for university presidents. The session will explore political and financial pressures, public scrutiny, campus challenges, social justice movements and the growing influence of AI. Discover how these forces are reshaping leadership — and share bold strategies to turn obstacles into opportunities.

*Speakers:*

The Honourable **Bob Rae**, Canada's 25th Ambassador to the United Nations

**Bonnie Patterson**, Executive Coach & Consultant, Higher Education Governance & Leadership

**10:45–11:00 a.m.**  
**Maple room**

## **Health break**

**11:00–12:00 p.m.**  
**Maple room**

## **Leadership & governance: Building a powerful board partnership**

Effective governance and presidential success hinges on your relationship with the board chair. This session dives into practical strategies for earning trust, sharpening communication and defining roles that drive accountability. Learn from real-world challenges like chair transitions, shifting board dynamics and unmet fiduciary expectations — and leave with tools to turn complexity into clarity.

*Moderator:*

**Bonnie Patterson**, Executive Coach & Consultant, Higher Education Governance & Leadership

*Speakers:*

**Cheryl Foy**, President, Strategic Governance Consulting Services

**Deb MacLatchy**, President, Wilfrid Laurier University

**Simon Chan**, Chair of the Board of Directors, Wilfrid Laurier University

**12:00–1:00 p.m.**  
**Harriet’s rooftop**

**Lunch**

**1:00 - 2:15 p.m.**  
**Maple room**

**Leadership in times of financial strain**

How do presidents keep the mission clear when resources are tight and pressures mount? What are the key relationships that need to be developed and managed? This session explores bold strategies for protecting core priorities, making disciplined choices and building resilience. Learn practical ways to assess trade-offs, reallocate resources and steer your institution through uncertainty without losing sight of its long-term vision.

*Moderator:*

**Sahra Ali**, Chief Financial Officer, Universities Canada

*Speakers:*

**Benoit-Antoine Bacon**, President, The University of British Columbia

**Jeff Hennessy**, President, Acadia University

**Susan Tighe**, President, McMaster University

**2:15–2:30 p.m.**  
**Maple room**

**Health break**

**2:30–3:45 p.m.**  
**Maple room**

**Moment of crisis: Leading when it matters most.**

Universities face risks that are bigger, faster and more unpredictable than ever. This session identifies tools to lead with clarity under pressure, to strengthen decision-making, prepare your team for critical events and build institutional resilience. Learn practical frameworks to manage major risk categories and turn challenge into confident action.

*Moderator:*

**Michelle Coates-Mather**, Vice-President, Public Affairs, Universities Canada

*Speakers:*

**Christian Blanchette**, Rector, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières

**Graham Carr**, President, Concordia University

**Matthew Pegg**, Deputy Minister of Emergency Preparedness and Response, Ontario

**3:45–4:00 p.m.**  
**Maple room**

**Reflections on day one**

Bonnie Patterson will share reflections on the key takeaways from day one.

**6:00–8:30 p.m.**

**Off-site dinner**

**National**

486 Front St W

## Tuesday, January 13, 2026

All times in this program are in Eastern Time (ET)

**7:30–8:45 a.m.**  
**Harriet's rooftop**

### **Breakfast**

A buffet breakfast will be available from 7:30 a.m. onwards.

**9:00–10:30 a.m.**  
**Maple room**

### **The life of a president: Privacy, well-being & resilience**

Behind the public role lies a private reality — constant scrutiny, relentless demands and the challenge of staying grounded. This session explores how presidents protect boundaries, manage stress and sustain resilience while leading under pressure. Walk away with practical strategies for balancing visibility with privacy, navigating diverse stakeholders and safeguarding personal well-being.

*Moderator:*

**Tim Rahilly**, President, Mount Royal University

*Speakers:*

**Lesley Rigg**, President, Brock University

**Maud Cohen**, Directrice générale, Polytechnique Montréal

**Michael Cullen**, Co-Director, Rotman Executive Coaching Certificate Program, University of Toronto

**10:30–10:45 a.m.**  
**Maple room**

### **Health break**

**10:45–12:00 p.m.**  
**Maple room**

### **Closing roundtable discussion**

Wrap up with a lively conversation led by Bonnie, where participants share reflections and turnkey takeaways into actionable ideas. This is a chance to connect, challenge perspectives and leave with clarity on what matters most.

*Moderator:*

**Bonnie Patterson**, Executive Coach & Consultant, Higher Education Governance & Leadership

**12:00–1:00 p.m.**  
**Maple room**

### **Lunch to go**

**1:00–1:15 p.m.**  
**1 Hotel reception**

### **Shuttle to Pearson International Airport**

Group transportation will depart for Toronto's Pearson International Airport