

Alumnus helps guide historic changes

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Revamped, crisp and modern, Western University's new shield – now its official identifier – admittedly isn't a far cry from the original.

While the old featured two lions side by side, with a book and a stag opposite one another in the top and bottom fields, the new shield features a stag and a lion side by side, keeping the book in the top field, there adding Western's founding year as well as a maple leaf in the bottom quadrant. And while some of the original features have been redesigned, the changes likely still look minimal.

But applying these small changes and making them official is part of a big process.

PATTERSON

In order to make even the slightest of alterations to its coat of arms – and, by extension, its shield – Western had to apply for a grant through the [Canadian Heraldic Authority](#), headed by the Governor General, said Bruce Patterson (BEd, '93), Deputy Chief Herald of Canada, who worked with Western on its rebranding.

"The university wanted to go back to something heraldic and to make a few changes," Patterson said.

Some of the heraldry office suggestions for Western's new shield included featuring a demi-lion in place of a full-bodied one to make identifying the animal on small-scale shields easier and keeping some small details on the body of the lion.

"On the body of the lion, there are two small triangular shapes called 'ermine spots.' It's a pattern in heraldry based on ermine fur, like the lining of a royal robe," Patterson explained.

"The crown on the lion refers to the Rev. Alfred Peache (Western's second chancellor, after Bishop Isaac Hellmuth). If you had a complete lion, with no crown and and no ermine spots, (the shield) becomes more generic and you lose the reference," he added.

While the grant is still being processed for Western's new coat of arms, Patterson said the university and the heraldry office came to an agreement on the appearance of the shield in time for the rebranding.

But why all the fuss?

A grant for a coat of arms, or 'an armorial bearing' is an honour from the Canadian Crown, Patterson said.

A request for a grant, Patterson said, is a petition to the Chief Herald of Canada, someone who has to assess and approve the request in order to have the Herald Chancellor or the Deputy Herald Chancellor sign a warrant for the grant. A herald works with the petitioner to create or modify an existing design, after which an artist appointed by the authority hand paints each coat of arms.

The heraldry office processes about 80 grants each year and the whole process – for each individual grant – takes roughly a year, costing anywhere from \$2,000 to \$5,000, Patterson said.

Western's original coat of arms was granted in 1931 by the College of Arms in England. It was the third to be used by the university, but the first one to be officially recognized.

The old Western coat of arms was also granted relatively early in the heraldic history of Canadian universities with the first being approved for the University of British Columbia in Vancouver.

"Western's (coat of arms) is also interesting because it was the first in the British Empire to have supporters – the two animals on either side," Patterson said.

For Patterson, a Western alumnus, working on Western's new visual identity was a worthwhile experience.

"It was different. Because I've designed coats of arms for many cities and (institutions) I'm not familiar with, it was nice to know just a bit of what the campus is and a bit of the campus history, going in. I was more familiar with this (project) than I would have been with others," he said.

The Canadian Heraldic Authority was established in 1988. Prior to that, Canadian individuals and institutions applying for a coat of arms would appeal to heraldic authorities in England and Scotland.