

**PRESIDENT'S REPORT TO
McMASTER UNIVERSITY'S BOARD OF GOVERNORS
OCTOBER 8, 2020**

Looking Forward: Challenges and Priorities for the 2020/21 Year

As I highlighted at the Board Retreat in September, this is once again a highly unusual academic year, although for quite different reasons to the 2019/20 year of leadership transition. As Board members are well aware from receiving the various letters and updates from the University leadership, we continue to navigate our way through the COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on providing the best possible teaching, learning, research and working environment, while working to respect Public Health guidelines and keep our community safe.

Against the backdrop of responding effectively to the global pandemic, we are also working through the visioning process launched last year. As you will have seen, following a range of consultations involving individuals from across the campus during the Spring and Summer, we have now begun a broader social media campaign: #ShapeTheFuture. This campaign invites faculty, students, staff and alumni to provide their thoughts on five big questions intended to help shape the future of McMaster. The feedback we receive will help determine a new vision statement and longer-term vision for the University, and will be followed by a shorter-term strategic plan intended to chart the course for McMaster over the next 2-3 years.

Priorities

In the meantime, as discussed at the Board Retreat, I am focused on the following seven priorities for the coming year:

Inclusive Excellence

The University has a robust EDI Strategy and Action Plan in place, and advancing and implementing the various elements of this plan will be a key priority over the coming year and beyond. Particular areas of focus include putting in place initiatives to address anti-Black racism, in collaboration with the African-Caribbean Faculty Association of McMaster University (ACFAM), including a program of strategic, targeted hiring; enhanced supports for Black faculty, staff and students; and the formalization of a mentoring program. Alongside this, we remain focused on Indigenous education and research and supporting the University's Indigenous Education Council as they develop strategies to guide Indigenous learning and scholarship at McMaster.

Student Learning

Clearly, our response to COVID-19 has necessitated major changes to the teaching and learning environment. The University leadership is extremely mindful of the impact on students as they undertake their academic studies in this largely virtual environment, and is equally concerned by the additional burden placed on faculty and staff as they work to adapt pedagogical techniques and program content to the virtual environment. While we remain focused on ensuring that faculty, staff and students have the technological and other supports they need to succeed in this changed learning environment, and have developed a Virtual Learning Task Force to assist with this, we are also keen to harness the positive aspects and technological advances that have been made as we focus on active learning and ensuring the best possible educational experience.

Research and Scholarship

The ongoing pandemic has brought into sharp focus the importance of accurate data and research, and the need for interdisciplinary approaches to solve the biggest problems facing our world. McMaster has the ability to make a huge and positive impact at the local, regional and global level in areas ranging from pandemic preparedness to climate change, social justice, Indigenous Ways of Knowing and advanced manufacturing (to name just a few). The impact of our research and scholarship, particularly as it relates to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, is accordingly a key area of focus over the coming year. The launch of the *Brighter World Research Initiative* with the initial focus on The Global Nexus for Pandemics and Biological Threats provides a means to focus our revenue-generation efforts in support of our researchers and demonstrate the global impact of the work undertaken in labs and offices across our campus.

Community Engagement

As a leading institution within the City of Hamilton, McMaster has a critically important role to play in the transformation of Hamilton and our region. Our research and scholarship has direct local impact, as does the engagement of our students and scholars in initiatives such as CityLAB, McMaster Innovation Park and The Forge. Throughout the pandemic we have positioned the University as a key partner and support, working closely with our hospital partners, as well as with the City and Public Health Hamilton. Looking to the future, the University will continue to perform this role and will no doubt be an important part of the economic and social recovery of Hamilton. Working closely with McMaster Innovation Park, we seek to position Hamilton as a recognized hub for innovation and knowledge translation. In addition, as part of our access strategy we are focused on enabling access to the University for members of our local community, and developing pathways for those who may not otherwise have seen a University education as a viable option.

Commercialization

As mentioned above, the translation of research and generation of revenue are critically important to the success of the University and our region. We are developing a broad conception of commercialization focused on ensuring the maximum impact, in terms of positive societal benefit, as well as revenue generation, of the research undertaken on our campus. As we build closer relations with McMaster Innovation Park and develop a clearer working partnership, we have the opportunity to support the commercial and entrepreneurial ambitions of our faculty and students at the same time as providing economic benefit to the University, the City and the region. Extra-curricular initiatives such as The Forge, as well as dedicated programming relating to commercialization and knowledge translation, continue to be extremely valuable to the growth and advancement of our students.

International Engagement

The restrictions on travel arising as a direct result of COVID-19 have changed the way we collaborate and engage at an international level. Nonetheless, international research collaborations and partnerships continue to flourish as our researchers and scholars find ways to connect and continue their research in the virtual environment. McMaster remains focused on building effective international partnerships and on raising the standing and profile of the University at a global level. Promoting the impact of our research through our participation in the UN Sustainable Development Goals Impact rankings has been extremely valuable in this regard.

We are also reviewing our international enrolment activities and are focused this year on ensuring the best possible support for our graduate and undergraduate international students, whether they are located on campus, or joining us remotely.

Operational Excellence

Building on the HR Review and the IT Services Review before that, we are committed to modernizing and streamlining administrative systems and processes across the University. To ensure the best possible support for our faculty, staff and students it is vital that we have professional and efficient administrative processes in place. A great deal of positive progress has been made in implementing the recommendations of the HR Review and our ongoing work with Uniforum provides the opportunity to review current working practices and benchmark against our peers with regard to a detailed range of key administrative services and supports.

Challenges

I have already touched on some of the challenges, many of which are focused around finding effective ways to operate the University in a largely virtual environment, ensuring that our faculty, students and staff have the supports, guidance and technology they need to learn, work and study effectively, as well as the social, mental and emotional supports needed to manage the remote teaching, learning and working environment. The mental and emotional toll of the last few months on members of our community cannot be overestimated; the level of fatigue as we grapple with managing the pandemic at the same time as we all undertake our regular duties in a completely changed environment is a particular cause for concern.

Aside from operating the University on a day to day basis, we are also working to manage and contain COVID-19 outbreaks in our communities, and continuing to monitor our budget, ongoing financial planning and risk profile so that we can understand the overall impact of the pandemic and make any adjustments as they are needed.

Alongside this, our focus on EDI has been amplified and accelerated by broader societal events affecting the Black and Indigenous communities, in particular, and we are working as an institution to understand and address systemic inequities and effect positive and concrete change across the Institution. Board Members received the letter I sent to the community over the summer outlining plans to address some of these issues and ensure that we are making positive progress to address racism and all other forms of discrimination on our campus.

In an effort to understand better the climate on campus and, in particular, the experiences of racialized and marginalized students, the University is also preparing to undertake a climate survey, which will be led by Arig al Shaibah and Sean Van Koughnett. The goal is to review the holistic student experience to ensure that the University has the programs and services in place to support a positive experience for students across our diverse community.

As Board Members may be aware, linked to the Black Lives Matter movement and as part of the broader societal campaign to defund Police Services, the University has received calls to remove Special Constables from our campus, end our working partnership with Hamilton Police Services, remove the current Director of Security and Parking Services, divert funding from Security Services to racially and culturally diverse mental health support, harm reduction

programs, food and housing security for students, commit to not hiring private security services and develop a reimagined security plan.

Since McMaster's Security and Parking Services provide a wide range of services and supports, that are not necessarily well publicized or understood, I attach to this report an Addendum providing additional details about the role, mandate, training and funding of Security Services for the information of Board Members.

CAMPUS UPDATE

Rankings Update

McMaster has been ranked 69th in the world by the 2021 Times Higher Education rankings, and is one of only four Canadian universities in the world's top 70. McMaster advanced three spots over last year, and continues the University's steady path of improvement, moving from 113 to 69 in just four years.

Building on the Institution's overall performance, McMaster's Clinical and Health programs are now ranked 11th in the world, moving up from 26th in last year's rankings. McMaster ranked 79th globally in Life Sciences. Other subject areas, including Engineering, Physical Sciences and Social Sciences, also experienced significant improvements.

McMaster was also top-ranked in Canada in the areas of citation impact and industry income.

This year's Times Higher Education World Ranking measured the performance of 1,527 universities from 93 countries using a number of performance indicators in the areas of teaching, research, citations, international outlook and industry income.

Awards and Accolades

Mark Loeb and Dawn Bowdish, both Professors of Pathology and Molecular Medicine in the Faculty of Health Sciences, are being honoured by the Royal Society of Canada.

Dr. Loeb, who is internationally recognized in the field of infectious diseases clinical trials and epidemiological studies, is a new Fellow of the Royal Society. He is known for his work on influenza vaccination and herd immunity in Canadian Hutterite communities, and for a pivotal trial on respiratory mask protection against influenza. He has also conducted influential clinical trials on prevention and management of infections in nursing home residents.

Dr. Bowdish is a new Member of the College of New Scholars, Artists and Scientists. She studies how the immune system changes with age and how these changes impact healthy or unhealthy aging and susceptibility to infections. She and her team work to uncover how the aging immune system and the microbes that live in and on us, known as microbiota, interact in order to prevent infections and give older adults more years of healthy, independent living. She holds the Canada Research Chair in Aging and Immunity.

Research Funding

As we look to the priorities and challenges of the upcoming academic year, McMaster remains at the forefront of COVID-19 related research.

McMaster to create and lead new International Nexus for Pandemics and Biological Threats

McMaster has launched The Global Nexus for Pandemics and Biological Threats, to ensure Canada and the world are better able to manage the human and economic devastation of COVID-19, avert future pandemics and mitigate global health threats like antimicrobial resistance. The Nexus will be an international network of scientists, clinical health and medical specialists, engineers, social scientists, history and policy researchers, economics and business experts. This work has been accelerated by a \$2M investment from Canadian philanthropist and entrepreneur, Stephen Jarislawsky, which will enable the creation of a new research chair in pandemic research and prevention at McMaster and act as a cornerstone of The Global Nexus.

McMaster HealthLabs, Air Canada and Greater Toronto Airports Authority to conduct a voluntary COVID-19 study of International Travellers

McMaster HealthLabs, Air Canada and the Greater Toronto Airports Authority are partnering on a voluntary COVID-19 study of international travellers arriving at Toronto Pearson International Airport. The study's core purpose is to gather information to explore the effectiveness of various quarantine periods for travellers. McMaster HealthLabs is a non-profit organization that develops COVID-19 research initiatives and testing solutions to accelerate business recovery during the pandemic.

McMaster heads Network to study deadly Blood Infections

A new McMaster University-based network will bring together researchers and patients to tackle sepsis—a leading cause of death in COVID-19. Hamilton MP Filomena Tassi announced an investment of \$5.7M by the federal government, through the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), to support Sepsis Canada.

Community Engagement

Socrates Project hosts three-day Festival of Ideas

The SHIFT 2020 festival, which ran from September 23 to 25, included virtual panel discussions, conversations, concerts and other events and featured contributions from community members from all ages and walks of life. High profile guests and panellists included Margaret Atwood, Naomi Klein, and Jeremy Dutcher.

iPadsforPatients connects people in hospital with their loved ones

Inspired by a similar campaign in New York City, Biochemistry Student, Aaron Hou, and friends decided to collect refurbished iPads and other devices to donate to local hospitals and help connect isolated patients with their loved ones.

Student Success

Data on Archway Program show that first-year students are making connections

Since it started this summer, the Archway Program has connected more than 8,000 first-year students with mentors. More than 200 communities, which include a coach, a mentor and about 40 students, are active on Microsoft Teams, and more than 4,000 one-to-one conversations between students and mentors have been logged so far.

Letters of inspiration to welcome the Class of 2024

Since 2018 McMaster's Alumni Association has reached out to alumni each year to send inspiring words to the incoming class of students. This year, the Alumni Association is donating \$1 to the Access Strategy Fund for every piece of advice. To date there have been over 900 messages submitted from 18 countries, including notes from graduating classes as far back as the 1950s.

Virtual Learning Task Force Established

A dedicated group to assess and address issues arising from the virtual learning environment has been established. Reporting to the Provost and Co-chaired by the Deans of Engineering and Social Sciences, the Virtual Learning Task Force will bring together the MacPherson Institute, technology experts, faculty members and others to support the best possible online learning experience. The Task Force is charged with identifying a coherent process for collecting feedback from both students and faculty, seeking solutions, sharing best practices and preparing a report to inform virtual teaching and learning best practices for the Winter 2021 term.