

**PRESIDENT'S REPORT TO
McMASTER UNIVERSITY'S BOARD OF GOVERNORS
DECEMBER 17, 2020**

Visioning Process for McMaster: Shape the Future

At the beginning of this month, I shared an [update](#) on the responses received to the recent Shape the Future visioning exercise. I very much appreciate the time and thought that so many members of our community committed to sharing their ideas, perspectives and concerns. This initiative builds on the many group and individual conversations that have taken place with members of the academic, administrative and student leadership, alumni, community members, Board members, and external partners over the last several months. Taken together, the various conversations, consultations, discussions and responses provide a clear picture of the areas and issues that members of our community view as critically important to McMaster, and our local and global communities, over the coming years. They also lay out a range of ambitions and hopes for our collective impact and ongoing societal contributions.

As mentioned in my update letter, not surprisingly, addressing critically important global issues such as climate change, racism, inequity and injustice, healthcare provision, poverty, and aging emerged as key areas of focus. Many participants were optimistic about McMaster's role in solving the big issues facing our world and making use of the transformative power of knowledge to create a fairer, more equitable future. As Board Members know, the University has become focused over the last few years on the importance of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and it is clear that members of the McMaster community see the opportunity to effect positive change in a number of these key areas.

More locally, a clear sense of McMaster's critically important role within Hamilton and the surrounding communities, including our local Indigenous communities, was articulated throughout the responses. This builds on our ongoing community engagement activities, and encompasses expanded entrepreneurial activities, increased technology and business-focused partnerships, employment opportunities, as well as enhanced pathways for access to education. The University's ongoing focus on equity, diversity and inclusivity permeated many of the discussions and responses, and clearly underlined the importance of sustained and concrete action in this area.

In thinking about the skills needed to thrive in our rapidly changing world, and currently in the largely virtual world, respondents focused on the importance of supporting our students to be flexible, adaptable and resilient, equipped with the skills needed to analyze and solve complex problems, think critically and across disciplinary boundaries, and enter the job market able to lead with empathy and compassion. The opportunities presented by the changed learning environment, and the importance of making the best possible use of advances in technology, retaining flexibility and ensuring that all necessary infrastructure and processes are in place to support our digital platforms, was also highlighted. As noted in the update letter, we are focused on ensuring that all appropriate resources and services are available to support our students and create a safe and inclusive environment for all. This issue will be considered further as part of the student climate survey and holistic review to be launched in the New Year.

Based on the clear picture I have received of the commitment of members of our University to making a positive impact on the world, building a clear sense of community, developing the partnerships and collaborations needed to support our scholars and ensure that we are well positioned to tackle the major local and global issues we face, I am working to finalize a refreshed vision statement capturing these key themes. I expect to share this long-term vision with the McMaster community early in 2021 and will then bring forward a shorter-term strategic plan based on the seven priorities previously discussed with the Board and outlined in my October report to the Board.

The consultation process has confirmed the clear sense of alignment across the campus around the priority areas of: Inclusive Excellence, Student Learning, Research and Scholarship, Community Engagement, Research Translation and Commercialization, International Engagement and Operational Excellence, and these will be developed further in the strategic plan.

Updates on Priorities

Given that I outlined plans related to all seven priorities in my last report, I am just highlighting significant developments in three key areas in this report:

Inclusive Excellence

I mentioned previously the range of initiatives being established in collaboration with the African-Caribbean Faculty Association of McMaster University (ACFAM), including a program of strategic, targeted hiring. I am delighted that, with the support of the Provost's Office and all the Faculty Deans, the University has been able to announce a cohort hiring initiative that will see the appointment of up to 12 emerging and established academics and scholars who will contribute to the advancement of Black academic excellence across all six Faculties. This represents an important step forward and forms part of the University's Strategic Equity and Excellence Recruitment and Retention (STEERR) program, which is a key priority within McMaster's EDI Strategy and Action Plan. Alongside this, we remain focused on Indigenous education and research and continue to support the University's Indigenous Education Council as they develop strategies to guide Indigenous learning and scholarship at McMaster.

Addressing racism in all its forms remains an important area of focus. Board Members will have seen the report of the Task Force that reviewed the Black Student-Athlete Experience and the McMaster Athletics Climate, which was completed at the end of October. As mentioned in my letter to the community at that time, the experiences of Black student-athletes recounted in the report are deeply disturbing and point to a culture of systemic anti-Black racism within the Department of Athletics and Recreation, which we are now working hard to address. A detailed action plan has already been launched to ensure that the recommendations are implemented and that positive and concrete change is effected.

The initiatives laid out in the action plan include establishing a Black graduate assistant coaching program, increasing the representation of Black staff within the Department and creating a number of new staff positions, establishing a Black Student-Athlete Council, developing additional Financial Aid awards, a mentoring program, and establishing a dedicated physical space for a Black student services office.

Student Learning

The Virtual Learning Task Force, established by the Provost earlier in the Fall to assess and enhance the virtual learning environment, respond to issues and concerns, and promote best practices, has now delivered its report. This includes 21 recommendations grouped in short, medium and long-term timelines, designed to offer support to both students and instructors, help alleviate stress heading into the virtual winter term and look ahead to possible solutions for the 2021-22 academic year. The suggestions range from establishing central hubs for course content, regular student surveys and offering practical, simple-to-execute tips to instructors, including reducing workloads for students, improving course organization, fostering stronger connections and giving students more opportunities to offer feedback.

This work was informed by more than 3,000 respondents to the MacPherson Institute Survey in October, the majority of them students. The bulk of those responding rated their overall experience with virtual learning positively — from excellent to fair. A significant number, a third of the respondents, expressed concern about their overall virtual learning experience, establishing interpersonal connections and cited feeling overwhelmed. Some instructors also mentioned feeling overloaded. The Task Force had previously highlighted that student mental health issues related to online learning and the ongoing pandemic, including stress, isolation, anxiety and motivation, are a critical issue. This will be considered further by a dedicated sub-committee of the McMaster Okanagan Committee and the recommendations provided by that group will be used to supplement the University's longstanding campus-wide mental health strategy and supports.

The Virtual Learning Task Force recommended that discussions regarding virtual learning should continue in 2021. This will be taken up through the University's Teaching and Learning Advisory Group and include technology experts, pedagogical experts, instructors, and students. The University leadership is extremely mindful of the impact on students of undertaking their academic studies in this largely virtual environment but is also keen to harness the positive aspects and technological advances that have been made as we focus on ensuring the best possible educational experience.

Operational Excellence

The Board has discussed on a number of occasions the importance of modernizing and streamlining administrative systems and processes across the University. Our goal is to be able to provide the best possible support for our faculty, staff and students. Several years ago we began working with Uniforum, which enables us to benchmark against our peers with regard to a detailed range of key administrative services and supports. At the December 17 Board meeting, our Vice-President (Administration), Roger Couldrey, who has been leading this work, will present an update on administrative initiatives and advances arising from the Uniforum work and from recent reviews of administrative operations. This work will lay the foundation for our focus on Operational Excellence over the coming years.

CAMPUS UPDATE

Awards and Accolades

Highly Cited Researchers

Eighteen McMaster researchers have been named on the 2020 international list of highly cited researchers, four more than last year. The list, which is compiled annually by Clarivate Analytics, recognizes researchers who have had significant and broad influence within their fields, or across disciplines. Researchers whose work is on the list are in the top 1% of citations for field and year in *Web of Science*, a citation index.

This year, more than 6,000 were included on the list, including 26 Nobel laureates. Those named represent approximately one in every 1,000 researchers in the sciences and social sciences.

The McMaster researchers on the list are:

- Elie Akl (Clinical scholar, Department of Medicine)
- Altaf Arain (School of Earth, Environment and Society)
- Jan Brozek (Department of Health Research Methods, Evidence and Impact)
- Stuart Connolly (Department of Medicine)
- Mark Crowther (Department of Pathology and Molecular Medicine)
- J. Devereaux (Department of Health Research Methods, Evidence and Impact)
- John Eikelboom (Department of Medicine)
- Gordon Guyatt (Department of Health Research Methods, Evidence and Impact; named in two fields)
- Roman Jaeschke (Department of Medicine)
- Glenda MacQueen (Psychiatry and Behavioural Neurosciences)
- Paul Moayyedi (Department of Medicine)
- Stuart Phillips (Department of Kinesiology)
- Walter Reinisch (Department of Medicine)
- Holger Schünemann (Department of Health Research Methods, Evidence, and Impact)
- Gregory Steinberg (Department of Medicine)
- Stephen Walter (Department of Health Research Methods, Evidence, and Impact)
- Gerald Wright (Biochemistry and Biomedical Sciences)
- Salim Yusuf (Department of Medicine)

WXN 18th Annual Canada's Most Powerful Women: Top 100 Awards

Dr. Juliet Daniel, Professor and Acting Associate Dean of Research and External Relations in the Faculty of Science, and member of the Board of Governors, has received a 2020 WXN Canada's Most Powerful Women: Top 100 Award in the category of Manulife Science and Technology, which recognizes women in STEM roles who are challenging the status quo for knowledge and female empowerment. Dr. Daniel's cancer biology research led to her discovery of a new gene "Kaiso", whose high expression is linked to racial disparities in cancer outcomes. The Top 100 Award recognizes her cutting-edge research, dedicated community service, and advocacy for women and equity-seeking groups.

Honorary Degree Recipients

At the November Fall Convocation celebration, held on November 19, McMaster was proud to honour Professor Emeritus, Gary Warner, with an Honorary Doctorate, along with Explorer Wade Davis and Philanthropist Mick Ebeling. Dr. Warner recalls being one of the only Black professors on campus when he started teaching at McMaster in 1967. He became an integral leader on and off campus, promoting peace, human rights and education and pioneering the study of African and Caribbean literature at the University. For more than 50 years Dr. Warner has worked to combat racism, bullying and poverty and promoted non-violence, justice and inclusion through numerous roles with many organizations, including Hamilton's Centre for Civic Inclusion, the Poverty Reduction Roundtable and the Hamilton Community Foundation.

Research Funding

McMaster researchers study saliva-based, asymptomatic testing as a route to limit the spread of COVID-19

Researchers at McMaster are studying the saliva-based testing procedures that would enable routine testing of asymptomatic individuals on a large scale. They believe the development and implementation of high-capacity testing procedures—which could be done in university labs—would enable large-scale and routine testing of asymptomatic people to better identify cases, isolate infected individuals and limit the spread of COVID-19.

Researchers discover drug combination dramatically cuts heart attack risk

Heart attacks, strokes and other cardiovascular incidents can be cut by 20 to 40 per cent through use of a polypill, which combines three blood pressure medications and a lipid-lowering drug, taken alone or with aspirin. The study was conducted in 89 centres from nine countries and coordinated globally by the Population Health Research Institute (PHRI), a joint institute of McMaster University and Hamilton Health Sciences.

Government of Canada awards \$2.5 million to McMaster to support COVID-19 border study with McMaster HealthLabs

McMaster has been awarded \$2.5 million from the Government of Canada to support the McMaster HealthLabs (MHL) Canadian International COVID-19 Surveillance Border Study at Toronto Pearson International Airport. The MHL study began in September 2020 and was established to gather data on the COVID-19 rates of incoming international travellers to help determine if an airport-based surveillance program is feasible.

From groundwater to wildfires, Global Water Futures invests \$2.4 million in McMaster researchers

Five McMaster projects have been awarded a further \$2.4M by Global Water Futures (GWF)—the world's largest university-led freshwater research program. In addition to an extension of funding for two current projects, Mountain Water Futures and Co-Creation of Indigenous Water Quality Tools, three new projects will be hosted at, or in partnership with, the University. These projects include research into waterborne diseases, minimizing wildfire risk and groundwater management.

Community Engagement

McMaster researchers receive almost \$75,000 in funding for projects with community partners

Three researchers in the Faculty of Social Sciences have received almost \$75,000 from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) to launch projects in partnership with community organizations. The Partnership Engage Grants allow university researchers to work closely with non-governmental and non-profit organizations, charitable foundations and other community partners, facilitating research that will help meet an immediate need or challenge.

Student Success

Fall Convocation – Virtual Celebration

The University marked Fall convocation with a virtual celebration on November 19. Convocation is an important time in the life of any university, and a time for all members of the McMaster community to share in celebrating the achievements of our students and anticipating all that they will achieve in the future. While it was not what any of us expected at the beginning of this year, everyone in the McMaster community was proud to celebrate our students' hard work, success, and the way they have excelled in the face of adversity.