

**PRESIDENT'S REPORT TO
McMASTER UNIVERSITY'S BOARD OF GOVERNORS
APRIL 22, 2021**

McMaster Institutional Priorities and Strategic Framework

Following the launch of McMaster's new vision statement earlier this year, I have been working with colleagues across the leadership team to finalize the strategic plan that will guide our University for the next three years, beginning with the 2021/22 academic year. The consultations and discussions that I engaged in over the last year, and which culminated in the *Shape the Future* social media campaign, were extremely helpful in drawing out those issues that members of our community care deeply about, and focusing on the specific areas where we can really differentiate ourselves as a institution. This includes enhancing our learning, teaching and research environment, advancing equity and inclusivity across our campus, collaborating together across Faculties, disciplines, and borders to help solve the major issues facing our world, serving our local and global communities effectively, and developing our staff and operational and administrative supports to be as successful, efficient, and responsive as possible.

The strategic plan included with the Board agenda package focuses our collective efforts around five key priorities, which I regard as fundamental to our work over the next several years:

- **Inclusive Excellence** – aspire to embed an inclusive approach that intentionally engages and respects a diversity of peoples, perspectives, and ways of knowing, in everything we do.
- **Learning and Teaching** – further advance and support innovation in learning and teaching, within and beyond the classroom, and across disciplines and Faculties, to elevate teaching as a professional discipline, and equip our students with the knowledge and skills needed to make a transformative impact on our world.
- **Research and Scholarship** – be the go-to place for world-class researchers and collaborators who share our values and commitment to working together across disciplines, sectors, and borders to develop knowledge, tackle global issues, and advance human understanding.
- **Engaging Local, National, Indigenous, and Global Communities** – further develop and expand our network of longstanding and respectful partnerships with communities, partners, research collaborators, and supporters for the benefit of all.
- **Operational Excellence** – enable the administrative operations of the University to most effectively support the institutional vision and aspirations of our community of researchers, scholars, teachers, and learners.

The strategic plan outlines and provides context for each of these priorities, and then lays out detailed areas of focus and specific goals, with associated activities and metrics in each case. The goal is to create a living document in which all areas of the campus can see themselves, which

captures the key priorities for the institution, and which provides the flexibility needed to allow us to respond effectively as an institution to the post- pandemic world.

The institutional plan is based upon, and consistent with, a number of pre-existing or recently developed strategic documents, including the EDI Strategy and Action Plan, the Community Engagement Strategy and the Teaching and Learning Strategy, and will itself be used as the basis for other planning processes throughout the institution, including the development of performance goals and accountability documents for the coming year. Alongside this will sit the Indigenous Education and Research Strategy which is being developed and led by the Indigenous Education Council.

In addition to the strategic plan, the leadership team is developing a risk pyramid to help evaluate and assess risk related to the various aspects of the plan; this will be reviewed and discussed in further detail with the Audit and Risk Committee. We are also developing a communications strategy to support the formal launch of the strategic plan once reviewed by the Senate and Board of Governors.

Planning for the Future

At our last Board meeting, I spoke about the formation and work of the *Return to McMaster* group, led by our Provost, Susan Tighe, and made up of McMaster researchers, staff, faculty, and students. The oversight committee and the various working groups have been working diligently over the last two months and are focused on making decisions that are agile, evidence-based, and place the health, safety, and wellbeing of our community first.

At this point it is impossible to know exactly how the pandemic will evolve, so we are not yet in a position to make any definitive announcements about the Fall. Our focus has been on finding ways to bring students back to campus for safe and meaningful experiences both inside and outside of the classroom. As long as public health restrictions allow, our plan is to increase the number of on-campus classes, focusing especially on the hands-on, community-engaged, and problem-based learning that McMaster is known for. Faculties, departments, and programs will have some flexibility to decide which modes of delivery work best for their programs and students. Our instructors have already made tremendous efforts to deliver the 2020/21 academic offerings, and we are very aware that their balance and wellbeing must also be at the forefront of our planning.

It is also our aim that students will be able to come to campus regularly throughout the Fall semester and to participate more fully in the life of the University. This might include attending an in-person class or learning opportunity, accessing the library, exercising in the gym, accessing student supports and services, meeting in small groups to collaborate on assignments, or participating in a student club.

We have also been planning for our residences to be open, and will be communicating more details around eligibility and capacity as soon as we are able to. We are also continuing to focus on the needs of our international students, including monitoring visa processing times and other Canadian entry requirements. We have plans in place that have been approved by Public Health

and will be doing everything we can to welcome international students safely to Hamilton and to McMaster.

We are also thinking about staff and working through scenarios for a gradual return to campus, while maintaining the flexibility offered by remote working where this is possible. Looking to the future, we want to be innovative in our thinking about the employee experience and are examining ways to do this, while supporting employee wellness, as well as the University's strategic goals.

There are still lots of unknowns with regard to public health restrictions, gathering limits, and vaccination roll-out and availability, but we will continue to provide updates as more details on the Fall term become available, and are committed to keeping the community informed and to providing certainty as soon as we are able to.

Canada's Global Nexus for Pandemics and Biological Threats

As part of our Board meeting, Dr. Gerry Wright will be presenting an update on *Canada's Global Nexus for Pandemics and Biological Threats*. This initiative is gathering significant momentum as we work to leverage our collective strength and international networks, and build an environment for the world's top experts across disciplines and sectors to work together. Our ultimate goal is to ensure that our collaborative efforts will ensure the world is better prepared to meet the challenges of future biological threats and bolster the international recovery from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

As Dr. Wright will outline, interdisciplinary teams are working to understand and deliver solutions across a range of areas, including:

- Advancing the development of novel treatments and vaccines;
- Identifying powerful diagnostics and creating tools to detect and diagnose threats;
- Developing and testing policy levers and rapidly generating data required for evidence-based policymaking;
- Using epidemiological models to inform decision-makers and support pandemic plans, protocols, and actions; and
- Creating social innovations that allow individuals and systems to withstand and rebound from future threats.

This nexus is intended to establish Canada as a leader among leaders within the international pandemic preparedness ecosystem. Our Public Affairs and University Advancement teams have been working closely with Dr. Wright for many months to raise awareness of, and promote the initiative with, all levels of government, as well as with potential collaborators, partners, supports, and donors; this is the initial focus of our *Brighter World Research Initiative* and an area where McMaster can really hope to make a positive impact for our local, national, and global communities.

CAMPUS UPDATE

New McMaster Rainbow Bursary Fund supports LGBTQ2S+ Graduate Students

As part of the University's ongoing focus on diversity and support for students, the McMaster Rainbow Bursary Fund, the first bursary designed solely for McMaster graduate students who are LGBTQ2S+, has just been launched. Supported by alumnus Ray Brillinger and Cy Hack, with a \$50,000 gift, the hope is that others will be inspired to contribute so more LGBTQ2S+ students can benefit from the bursary fund.

Focus on Employment Diversity Initiatives

For the third consecutive year, McMaster has been ranked one of Canada's Best Diversity Employers in an annual competition that recognizes organizations with successful workplace diversity initiatives in a variety of areas. Although there is much more work to do, progress is being made and there is strong commitment throughout the University to support and advance the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and Action Plan, including employment equity initiatives and enhancing inclusive excellence in teaching and research across all academic programs.

Future of Canada Project

The University has just announced the creation of the Future of Canada Project. Supported by a generous \$5M gift from Chancellor Emeritus L.R. "Red" Wilson, this initiative is intended to enable novel and diverse research exploring the possibilities for Canada in the next decade. The Project supports collaboration among McMaster researchers from various fields of study and leverages a national Council of leaders and experts, led by Dr. Samantha Nutt, for their guidance and perspectives. The Project's mandate, over a three-year pilot timeline, is to help amplify the research impact by reaching new stakeholders, including policy makers, business and community leaders, and the public, and to deepen our collective understanding of Canada today and the Canada we would like to see in the future.

Research

Five McMaster Projects receive \$35M in Federal Funding

The Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI) has awarded more than \$35M to five projects that will build and expand the tools to bolster McMaster's nationally recognized strengths in materials research and healthy aging. The projects include work focused on neutron scattering in McMaster Nuclear Reactor's neutron beam lab, which has the potential to support technologies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, aid the fight against cancer, Alzheimer's, and antibiotic resistance, and enhance our knowledge of quantum materials; support a platform for Interdisciplinary Research as part of the Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging to build tools that will help the identification of the early causes of conditions such as mobility impairment, disability, cognitive decline, and other health conditions to inform the development of interventions to increase disability-free healthy life span; develop the work of the Canadian Centre for Electron Microscopy and the Canadian Light Source in a study considering the dynamic characterization of the structure and composition of materials as they evolve under use; support unprecedented multi-scale 3-D imaging of the evolution of the structure of materials under conditions that mimic manufacturing and service, which will support areas as varied as

advanced manufacturing, medical device production, and the construction industry; and work focused on bio-compatible materials engineering, including monitoring from farm-to-fork, transformative photovoltaics, and materials and devices for integrated photonics to maximize the economic and social impact of academic research in nanotechnology.

Vaccines and Long-Term Care: Large McMaster Study receives \$5M in Funding

McMaster researchers are beginning one of the largest single studies focusing on long-term care homes in Canada to find out how well vaccination works in long-term care settings, and which features of the long-term care environment may be directly linked with outbreaks. The Government of Canada, through its COVID-19 Immunity Task Force (CITF), is supporting the study with almost \$5M. This research project is part of *Canada's Global Nexus for Pandemics and Biological Threats*, mentioned earlier in this report.

McMaster-led Team unlocks possible Crohn's Disease Trigger

Potentially game-changing research led by McMaster University scientists may finally bring relief to millions of people worldwide living with Crohn's disease. Investigator Brian Coombes said his team identified a strain of adherent-invasive E-coli (AIEC) that is strongly implicated in the condition and is often found in the intestines of people with Crohn's disease.

Community Engagement

Volunteer Program connects Students with Newcomers to Canada

In partnership with the Canada Connects program in Hamilton, students within McMaster's department of Health, Aging and Society are being matched with newcomers to Canada for virtual conversations. Canada Connects helps familiarize newcomers to Canada with the social, political, and cultural contexts of their new community and provide friendship, advice, and support. As an example, one McMaster student who participated in the program helped his contact to successfully navigate the post-secondary application process.

McMaster's Waterloo Campus assists with Vaccine Clinic Launch

Faculty, staff, and students of McMaster's Waterloo campus worked with health partners in Waterloo to launch an onsite vaccination clinic for the community. Around a hundred students, medical residents, faculty, staff, and volunteers from the regional campus are working at the clinic. The clinic will continue to immunize between 1,000 to 2,000 people a day, seven days a week until the end of August, using the Pfizer vaccine.