

**PRESIDENT'S REPORT TO
McMASTER UNIVERSITY'S BOARD OF GOVERNORS
JUNE 10, 2021**

Reflections on the 2020/21 Academic Year: Priorities and Challenges

In October I laid out a number of key priorities and challenges for the 2020/21 academic year. As we reach the end of the year it seems appropriate to reflect back and provide an update on progress made in a number of those areas.

I noted in October our continued navigation through the COVID-19 pandemic, and our focus on providing the best possible teaching, learning, research and working environment, while respecting public health guidance and keeping our community safe. While I do not think we anticipated in October that we would spend the entire year in a virtual environment, I am satisfied that we have done so successfully and am extremely appreciative of the work and efforts of our faculty and staff, the flexibility and engagement of our students, as well as the support of our governing bodies.

Against the backdrop of responding effectively to the global pandemic, we also spent the year completing the visioning process, which led to the #ShapeTheFuture social media campaign, and the eventual launch of McMaster's new vision statement. This was followed by the finalization and launch of our strategic plan, which will guide the University for the next three years, beginning with the 2021/22 academic year. As I have noted previously, the consultations and discussions I engaged in as part of that process were extremely helpful in drawing out the issues that members of our community care deeply about, and focusing on the specific areas where we can really differentiate ourselves as a institution.

Inclusive Excellence: Update on Ongoing Initiatives

On that note, as Board Members are well aware, Inclusive Excellence is a current and ongoing area of focus for the University, and for me personally. The tragic global events of the last year, including the murder of George Floyd and the racist treatment of Joyce Echaquan, by hospital workers in Quebec, highlighted further the inherent racism in our society and the ill-treatment of Black and Indigenous people, and other equity deserving groups, by institutions in our communities. To help respond to this, I have dedicated time to listening and trying to understand the experiences of the members of our diverse University community, and have been working with the Equity and Inclusion Office, Student Affairs, the members of the African and Caribbean Faculty Association of McMaster (ACFAM), the President's Advisory Committee on Building an Inclusive Community (PACBIC), the Indigenous Education Council, the Faculty Deans, and other members of the senior administration to advance positive and lasting change.

Athletics and Recreation: Review of the Black Student Athletes Experience

Last Fall, I received the report of the task force reviewing the experiences of Black student-athletes at McMaster. The review described a culture of systemic anti-Black racism within Athletics and Recreation and made recommendations for change, which we accepted and are acting on. This work is being led by our newly-hired Senior Advisor on Equity, Inclusion and Anti-Racism, Clare Warner. The Athletics and Recreation Department recently released an update and an action plan, which is focused on an ongoing process to increase representation of

Black student athletes and staff; build a culture of accountability; develop targeted supports and scholarships for Black students; create advocacy roles and mechanisms; and deliver anti-racism training and education across the Department.

Ongoing activities related to this work have been informed by two groups that were established following the review – a departmental Anti-Racism Advisory Group and a Black Student Athletes Council. The Advisory Group is made up of diverse staff and Black student athletes who will provide guidance on how to implement the action plan, while the Council was established to be the collective voice of student athletes who identify as Black by advocating on their behalf and meeting with leadership to support student interests. As part of the Department's focus on education and training, and the promotion of dialogue with Black student athletes, the Council will also develop anti-racism programming.

Black Excellence Cohort Hiring Initiative

Board Members will recall the launch in November 2020 of the cohort hiring initiative, intended to attract up to twelve exceptional Black scholars to McMaster. The initiative has drawn more than 460 prospective faculty members whose applications are currently being reviewed by search committees across all six Faculties. I have met – virtually – a number of the new Black faculty who will be joining us in the coming year, and am looking forward to welcoming them to McMaster, and benefitting from the breadth and innovation of their research and scholarship, as well as their commitment to student learning and mentorship.

In addition to the launch of the Black Scholar cohort hiring initiative, the University has made investments to support the following priority areas:

- Establishment and expansion of Black student scholarships;
- Establishment of Postdoctoral Fellowships for recent Black graduates and early career scholars;
- Coordination of African and African Diaspora Studies by a faculty lead;
- Support for ACFAM-led annual events, including Black History Month;
- Launch of an Employee Resource Group for Black, Indigenous, and Racialized Staff;
- Expansion of the ACFAM-led Black Student Mentorship Program;
- Hiring of a Black Student Services Manager, reporting to the Associate Vice-President, Student Learning, in addition to the hiring of the Senior Advisor, Equity, Inclusion and Anti-Racism mentioned earlier in this report; and
- Development of a coaching and development program for Black scholars called Thrive.

It is clear that we have much more to do, but I am encouraged by the energy and ideas from our community regarding the ways we can address systemic racism in every aspect of university life.

Student Census

Earlier in the year McMaster's Equity and Inclusion Office invited all undergraduate, graduate and medical students who were registered in either Fall 2020 or Winter 2021 to participate in the inaugural Student Census and Experience Survey (SCES). The survey incorporated disaggregated demographic questions – an EDI best practice – and will support data analysis to understand differences in the student experience across a diversity of student groups. The overall goal is to: 1) understand the holistic student experience across dimensions of student wellness

and success; and 2) reveal if there are thematic differences in student experience across diverse groups of students.

A total of 37,860 students were invited to take the survey and 7,014 students completed the survey by the closing date of March 5, which is a response rate of 18.53 per cent. Institutional Research and Analysis has been reviewing the data and has generated a series of Fact Booklets, which are being shared and discussed with student-facing campus partners across the University. A summary report is being prepared and further information will be made available as this work progresses.

For the future, it is planned to decouple the census and climate questionnaires, with the census questionnaire to be linked to Mosaic and available year-round so students can update their demographic profiles at any time. The climate questionnaire will be repeated every three to five years. Our goal is to increase the census response rate, to allow for the more accurate extrapolation of data to the larger population and associated inferences about differential experiences.

Some of the themes that emerged from the climate survey included potential improvements to teaching and learning with regard to issues of social/global equity and justice; suggestions for enhancements to better support health, well-being, and success; ideas for fostering a culture of inclusion/anti-discrimination, as well as safety, and inclusivity. A range of comments were received with regard to different services, with no particular area receiving disproportionately positive or negative responses. The outcomes and comments are being reviewed with a view to further improving or diversifying services where appropriate.

Planning for the Future

In late May, after extensive discussions and consultations with experts and stakeholders across the campus and beyond, the Return to McMaster Oversight Committee released its report. The report provides overarching guidance on issues to consider when planning for the Fall and is being used by other key University planning committees who are examining the critical areas of vaccination and testing on campus; space design, use and capacity; parking and transportation; food service and eating on campus; student services and student life activities; and workplace best practices. Further details will be released over the summer months and as further clarity is provided around public health guidance and restrictions. Specific information for students has also been issued, with details of what we are working towards in the areas of course selection and delivery; student services, learning supports and amenities; and international student affairs, as well as information regarding the University's residence buildings.

As stated previously, we are focused on providing safe and meaningful in-person experiences for as many students as possible this Fall, and are prioritizing use of the campus for students and researchers to make the best possible use of our labs, equipment, libraries, and campus-based resources. We are planning for this to include more in-person learning opportunities across all Faculties; on-campus student services; small group study, meeting and club space; access to critical learning supports such as the library; and access to amenities like the gym and food services.

CAMPUS UPDATE

McMaster Launches Inaugural Teaching and Learning Strategy

Building on the broader institutional strategy and on the University's history of problem-based learning, hands-on experiences, and cross-Faculty collaboration, McMaster's first ever Teaching and Learning Strategy has now been launched. The five-year plan is rooted in community consultation and focuses on supporting digital learning, rethinking use and definitions of space, encouraging inclusive and accessible teaching, and building partnerships across disciplines.

Director, Sexual Violence and Response

Building on McMaster's commitment to strengthen sexual violence prevention and response on campus, the University has commenced a search for a Director to lead and further guide this work. The Director will lead the Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Office (SVPRO) and Anti-Oppression Programs (AOP), two distinct but interconnected portfolios within the Equity and Inclusion Office. The SVPRO promotes effective sexual violence prevention education and policy response and the AOP promotes effective inclusion and anti-oppression education and support programs for the campus community.

Spring 2021 Convocation Ceremonies

Beginning on June 14, the University is preparing for an exciting week of seven convocation ceremonies. Approximately 6,300 McMaster students will graduate, with virtual celebrations to be available on the Registrar Office's dedicated convocation website. The online ceremonies will feature remarks from Deans, honorary degree recipients and valedictorians. Faculty-specific Kudoboards have also been set up and are open to all graduates, family, friends, faculty and staff to submit congratulatory messages. Honorary Degrees are being awarded to nine recipients, in recognition of achievements as diverse as preserving Mohawk culture, to developing scientific solutions to protect our oceans. The recipients are: Marilyn Ray (School of Nursing); Karen Maidment (DeGroote School of Business); Inspector Baltej Singh Dhillon (Social Sciences); Ima Tekákhwa Johnson (posthumous honorary degree, Social Sciences); Robert Watts (Social Sciences); Julie Angus (Science); Anne Innis Dagg (Science); Faizel Lakhani (Engineering); and Joseph Liburdi (Engineering).

President's Awards recognize Inspiring, Student-Centred Educators

Five faculty members are being recognized with the President's Award for Outstanding Contributions to Teaching and Learning for their commitment to innovation, mentorship and their dedication to students' learning. Award recipients Mohamed Bakr (Faculty of Engineering); Rita Cossa (DeGroote School of Business); Catherine Gris  (Faculty of Humanities); Matthew Sibbald and Justine Hamilton (Faculty of Health Sciences) were nominated by peers, leaders, and partners within the campus community.

Research

McMaster places 14th in the world in Times Higher Education Impact Rankings

Moving up three positions in the international rankings, McMaster placed first in Canada for impact on good health and well-being. More than 1,200 universities from 98 countries submitted data for the 2021 rankings, compared to approximately 850 participants last year.

\$5M Gift aimed at supporting Canada's most Vulnerable Seniors

Suzanne Labarge, McMaster Chancellor Emerita and alumna, is investing \$5 million in research to help improve the lives of marginalized and at-risk seniors. This gift will support the creation of the MIRA | Dixon Hall Centre, a unique partnership between the McMaster Institute for Research on Aging (MIRA) and Dixon Hall, an established multi-service agency located in the heart of downtown Toronto.

McMaster Lab Diagnoses Blood Clots related to COVID-19 Vaccine

The McMaster Platelet Immunology Laboratory has pivoted to a new role as the only Canadian lab able to diagnose rare blood clot issues induced by COVID-19 vaccines, including Canada's first case in Quebec.

Seven McMaster Researchers Recognized as University Scholars

The University Scholar designation is awarded to researchers who have distinguished themselves internationally and demonstrated a commitment to the discovery, communication and preservation of knowledge, as well as excellence in education and serving local and global communities. This year seven McMaster researchers were recognized with this award:

- Teresa Chan (Department of Medicine) for her outstanding contributions to emergency medicine research.
- Richard Whitlock (Department of Surgery) for his leadership and research within the Perioperative & Surgery Program at the McMaster University/Hamilton Health Sciences affiliated Population Health Research Institute (PHRI).
- Netina Tan (Department of Political Science) for her contributions to enhancing the understanding of the role of gender and ethnicity in politics.
- Amber Dean (Department of English and Cultural Studies) for her work on cultural memory and public mourning.
- Leyla Soleymani (Canada Research Chair in Miniaturized Biomedical Devices) for her significant contributions in studying and developing biosensors and biomedical devices.
- Graham Scott (Canada Research Chair in Comparative and Environmental Physiology) for his work in the area of animal physiology to improve our broader understanding of the implications of climate change for various species.
- Andrea Gonzalez (Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Neurosciences) for her research and leadership studying childhood maltreatment and family violence.

Community Engagement

McMaster Students share their Innovative Ideas for a More Sustainable World

Two McMaster student teams will advance to the final round of an international competition aimed at finding innovative ways to address the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

Students connect with Local Seniors during the Pandemic through Pen-Pal Program

McMaster charity Student Open Circles started the Seniors Connect program during the pandemic to help alleviate isolation among older adults in the community. During the 2020-21 academic year, student volunteers wrote more than 2,000 letters to residents at CityHousing Hamilton and Shalom Village