

**PRESIDENT'S REPORT TO
McMASTER UNIVERSITY'S BOARD OF GOVERNORS
DECEMBER 9, 2021**

Returning to Campus: Supporting our Community

As Board Members know, throughout the fall we have seen a gradual return to campus, with increasing numbers of students, faculty, and staff making use of our labs, classrooms, equipment, libraries, and campus-based resources. We have also been planning for the winter term and early in November the Provost and I issued a [joint letter](#) outlining our plans for winter, as well as the guiding principles that underpin our planning and decision making. One of our goals is to retain flexibility around working models, while building the sense of community across the campus that inspires students, supports intellectual curiosity, and encourages creativity. Individual units are being encouraged to develop approaches that will work for their areas, including pilot projects on ways to share work spaces, balance schedules, and manage meetings when people are in various locations, while striving to retain and build upon this important sense of community.

We also recognize that we have now been managing through the pandemic for a very long time and that this has taken its toll on members of our community in a variety of ways. For all members of our community, whether located onsite throughout the pandemic when the campus was very quiet, or working remotely and now adjusting to life back on campus, or to a hybrid arrangement, the New Year represents a significant period of change and transition. With this in mind we are focusing our efforts on providing the supports necessary to ensure a healthy transition to increased in-person activities after almost two years, while prioritizing the health, safety, and well-being of all members of our community.

As some Board Members will recall, in March 2017, McMaster signed the Okanagan Charter, and confirmed our institutional commitment to health and wellness across all aspects of our operations. Following the recommendation of the Virtual Learning Task Force in the fall of 2020, the University established the McMaster Okanagan Mental Health and Well-Being Task Force, which was asked to make recommendations to the University around mental health programming and policies affecting McMaster's students, faculty, and staff.

The Task Force focused on three distinct areas: mental health, well-being, and psychological health, and sought to understand the issues facing individual students, staff, and faculty, as well as considering the ways in which the university environment influences student, staff, and faculty mental health and well-being, both positively and negatively. The Task Force recently presented a series of ten recommendations designed to support these three critically important areas. The recommendations focus on helping our campus community, particularly students, locate high-quality mental health and well-being supports, care, and resources when needed, and on building psychological health and safety. The intention is to create the conditions at McMaster that allow students, staff, and faculty to move through this period of transition without experiencing unnecessary stress or distress, and enable them to perform to their full potential.

The recommendations are currently under consideration by the University administration, but work has already begun with regard to the proposed audit of the University's mental health

supports to identify any gaps in our current programs, policies, and processes. This audit will measure our performance against the National Psychological Health and Safety Standard for Post-Secondary Students. Notably, McMaster is one of the first institutions in Canada to undertake an audit against this standard. Once complete, the findings will help guide our approach in this important area.

The Task Force also recently released the *Compassionate Communication Toolkit* for University leaders. This toolkit includes information and advice for leaders on how best to communicate with team members during the important period of the transition back to campus. In addition, to supporting the focus on the health and well-being of our community more broadly, over the last year the Okanagan Special Project Funding Competition awarded funding to twelve different projects aimed at advancing health and well-being across campus. These included virtual well-being resources, exercise and wellness classes, mindfulness sessions, and a workshop focused on the return to in-person learning and work.

As Board Members are aware, the McMaster Student Wellness Centre plays a vital role with regard to supporting the health and well-being of our students. The Centre offers counselling, medical care, and health promotion services designed to meet the unique demands of our diverse student population. Current programming includes emotion management workshops, healthy relationship workshops, acceptance and commitment therapy sessions, a group addiction recovery program, and a peer mentorship program, to name just a few.

The recently announced increase to mental health service funding for the postsecondary sector by the provincial government will allow McMaster to increase the complement of counsellors from fifteen to twenty, and expand the Centre's capacity to assist students struggling with eating disorders, mood disorders, addictions, and other mental illnesses. A portion of this funding will also be allocated toward expanding counselling services designed specifically for Indigenous students. Student Accessibility Services has also undergone a reorganization and bolstered its staffing to provide increased capacity to support students with mental health disabilities, a group that currently numbers more than 1,900.

McMaster's Student Support and Case Management Office also continues to evolve and plans are underway to incorporate a Student Urgent Response Team into its service delivery model. In partnership with Security Services, the Student Urgent Response Team will help provide rapid support to students experiencing mental health crises.

The University is also taking steps to expand access to spiritual care. In October, McMaster launched the Spiritual Care and Learning Centre, an initiative aimed at making spiritual care a more accessible and comprehensive service for all students, regardless of their background. For many years, the Chaplaincy Centre was the only such service on campus, which left many community members unserved. Housed within the Student Success Centre, this new centre will offer inclusive spiritual services to all students as they return to campus next term.

To support our faculty and staff, McMaster's Human Resources team continues to offer year-round mental health initiatives to help employees manage their work-life balance and psychological wellness, alongside external support from organizations such as Homewood

Health. Faculty and staff can also access the *Professor Hippo-on-Campus: Student Mental Health Education Program for Educators and Navigators*. This program is designed to strengthen the mental health literacy of our campus community, so that we are better equipped to support students in distress. All staff and faculty can register for this online program and receive a certificate on completion.

To help build community and a sense of belonging for staff, the University has also recently launched an Employee Resource Group for Black, Indigenous, and Racialized Staff. The Group is intended to support both individual and institutional goals by amplifying the voices of staff members; creating a network to support career growth; enhancing the feeling of connectedness, belonging and empowerment reported by staff; and improving institutional awareness of staff experiences.

The University leadership recognizes that our faculty, staff, and students are McMaster's most valuable resource and is committed to supporting the health and well-being of all members of our campus community over the coming months and years. In addition to the recommendations and initiatives mentioned above, our Public Affairs team continues to advocate for increased operational funding and tuition flexibility to ensure that we have the resources necessary to expand our mental health service capacity in a significant and sustained manner.

CAMPUS UPDATE

State of the Academy Address

On November 18, our Provost, Susan Tighe, delivered McMaster's virtual State of the Academy address to more than 800 live participants. Dr. Tighe offered a snapshot of the University's current position and future plans, including updates on the implementation of the Teaching and Learning Strategy; McMaster's Black Excellence Cohort Hiring Initiative; Indigenous Strategic Directions; Experiential and community-engaged learning and research opportunities; and mental health and well-being initiatives across campus.

McMaster signs Scarborough Charter

In November, McMaster was one of almost 50 post secondary institutions to sign *The Scarborough Charter on Anti-Black Racism and Black Inclusion in Canadian Higher Education*. This historic charter commits the University to redressing anti-Black racism and fostering an inclusive environment for Black students on campus. The charter also identifies key barriers to inclusion, recommends concrete actions that will address systemic racism, and includes accountability measures for institutions.

Fall Convocation 2021

Virtual convocation ceremonies were held on November 25 and 26 for graduates across all six Faculties and the Arts & Science program. The virtual ceremonies were followed by a series of smaller, in-person celebratory events on campus. Students Elizabeth Culp from the Faculty of Health Sciences and Claudia Turco from the Faculty of Science were awarded the Governor General's Academic Gold Medal for high scholastic achievement as part of the ceremonies. Honorary degrees were awarded to Don McLean, a local environmental activist, and Tebello

Nyokong, a trailblazer in the field of chemistry. In addition, an honorary degree was awarded posthumously to Harold Brathwaite, a highly-respected and ground-breaking educator in Ontario.

Global Learning and Engagement

During the month of November, McMaster hosted several global-themed programs as part of McMaster Global, an initiative designed to highlight activities across campus that offer diverse perspectives on global issues. Global Entrepreneurship Week was also held in November, seeking to inspire new ideas and innovation for the benefit of all.

Research

Weston Family Foundation Funds \$12M Initiative

The Weston Family Foundation is awarding a \$12M research grant to the Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging, based at McMaster, for a new initiative that will shed light on the many factors that influence brain health as we age, including lifestyle and the human microbiome.

Centre for Discovery in Cancer Research

Launched formally on October 25, McMaster's new Centre for Discovery in Cancer Research will draw together clinicians and scientists from across Hamilton, focusing their research on treatment-resistant cancers with high death rates, including glioblastoma, triple-negative breast cancer, and pancreatic cancer, to name just a few.

Promising New Antimalarial Compound Discovered

A study undertaken by the Michael G. DeGroote Institute for Infectious Disease Research has resulted in the discovery of a promising new antimalarial compound. Co-led by Gerry Wright, Professor of Biochemistry and Biomedical Sciences and the inaugural lead of Canada's Global Nexus, the discovery opens the door to the development of new drugs targeting malaria, one of the deadliest infectious diseases on the planet. Collaborating with the University of Hamburg in Germany, the research teams performed a screen of soil bacteria extracts for antimalarials and identified an extremely potent inhibitor of malaria development.

McMaster Research Reveals Impact of Canada's Carbon Stores

New data from McMaster researchers shows, for the first time, how much carbon is stored in Canada's landscapes. Findings from McMaster's Remote Sensing Laboratory suggest that 405 billion tonnes of carbon are stored in ecosystems across the country. The total amount of carbon mapped by the researchers is the equivalent to about 30 years of human-caused global greenhouse gas emissions.

Platelet Lab becomes National Testing Centre

A grant from the Public Health Agency of Canada has cemented the McMaster Platelet Immunology Laboratory as Canada's premier centre for combatting vaccine-related blood clots. The funds of almost \$1.5M designated to the lab will provide confirmation and reports of Vaccine-Induced Immune Thrombotic Thrombocytopenia, better known as VITT.

Community Achievements

VP Research, Karen Mossman, and Medical Student, Samra Zafar, among Canada's Top 100 Most Powerful Women

McMaster's Vice-President, Research, Karen Mossman, has been named one of Canada's Top 100 Most Powerful Women. Dr. Mossman has earned a reputation as one of Canada's finest virologists and was the first woman to hold the position of Chair in the 50-year history of the Department of Biochemistry and Biological Sciences. Samra Zafar, a Medical Student at McMaster, was also named to this list. Ms. Zafar is an award-winning speaker, bestselling author, and human rights advocate. Her book, *A Good Wife*, is based on her personal story of escaping gender-based oppression to pursue her education.

Engineering Project Success

Lianna Genovese has turned her first-year engineering project into an award-winning device that empowers people with limited hand mobility to live richer lives. The project, known as Guided Hands, has come a long way since the biomedical engineering student and two classmates built a prototype out of pipe cleaners and straws in the Faculty of Engineering's design studio. Ms. Genovese also won the 2021 Canadian James Dyson Award for the device.

Lion's Lair Competition Success

Ron Galaev, a Biomedical Discovery and Commercialization student at McMaster, won the top prize in the Innovation Factory's Lion's Lair pitch competition for his smartphone app, EmergConnect. The app aims to improve the patient experience by connecting patients to hospital emergency rooms. St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton is in the final stages of approvals with an EmergConnect pilot, and the start-up has attracted \$350,000 in pre-seed funding.