

**PRESIDENT'S REPORT TO
McMASTER UNIVERSITY'S BOARD OF GOVERNORS
APRIL 20, 2017**

The Fundamental Importance of Academic Freedom

In my last report to the Board, I highlighted the response of universities across Canada and beyond to the now notorious *Executive Order: Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States* implemented by the Trump administration, and subsequently blocked by the courts. In drawing attention to the response of the academy, I noted that the life of any great university depends on the “free flow of people and ideas” and that the intellectual concept of academic freedom underpins any university worthy of the name.

Over the last few weeks I have had cause to reflect a great deal on the fundamental importance of academic freedom to our community and on the importance of ensuring that our campus is a place where controversial opinions can be considered and debated. Many Board Members will be aware of the events surrounding the recent visit of Dr. Jordan Peterson, a Professor at the University of Toronto, to our campus. Dr. Peterson has been the subject of media interest regarding his opposition to Bill C-16, which proposes adding gender identity and gender orientation to the Canadian Human Rights Act, and his refusal to use gender-neutral pronouns. Dr. Peterson’s talk, which was originally conceived and planned as a panel discussion on political correctness and freedom of speech on campus, was interrupted by noisy protestors who chanted slogans, rang cowbells, and attempted to prevent him from speaking. As I stated in an Open Letter to the McMaster community soon afterwards, while such behaviour clearly does not reflect the standard of debate that we would hope to see on our campus, the right to engage in peaceful protest must also be respected and upheld.

It has never been the practice of this University to shut down events, exclude speakers, or prevent voices raised in opposition from being heard. It has also not been our practice to use Security Services, who have as their core mandate the safety and security of our campus community, to silence protests or to police the academic life of our University. There is, however, a line to be drawn between actions that can reasonably be considered peaceful protest, and those that are intended to stifle or prevent any form of intellectual discourse or debate. It is clear that McMaster is not alone in grappling with this problem. Across North America universities have been dealing for some time with increasing numbers of protests in relation to certain controversial speakers, including demands that invitations be revoked, or particular speakers blocked. In response to these concerns, the University of Chicago struck a committee to consider freedom of expression, which was followed by a committee specifically tasked to make recommendations on University discipline for disruptive conduct, while the Texas A&M University recently developed a new policy on the hosting and sponsorship of events on its campus, and faculty at Middlebury College released a statement of core principles relating to free inquiry after a protest on their campus degenerated into violence.

Here at McMaster we are in the process of putting together a small faculty-led Committee to consider and recommend appropriate principles or guidelines to assist event organizers and hosts in responding to disruptive conduct. We also plan to engage in a review of our current event

planning and approval processes to explore whether any changes or enhancements might usefully be made. Fundamental to all of this, though, must be the recognition that the freedom to engage in full and unrestricted consideration of any opinion, no matter how controversial, and to teach, research and learn unhindered by non-academic constraints is the cornerstone of academic life. It is our responsibility as an institution of higher learning to steadfastly uphold this principle, to protect the free flow of ideas, and to encourage respectful debate and discussion even where there is fundamental disagreement between opposing voices. Whenever this is called into question, it is my duty as President to defend the principle unequivocally, and it is for this reason that I felt it necessary to take the unusual step of issuing an open letter to the McMaster community, the text of which is set out below.

“Academic Freedom and the Role of the Academy: An Open Letter to the McMaster Community – Circulated on March 20, 2017

Dear Members of the McMaster University Community,

I said in a recent interview with students that the most serious thing I have to do in my role as President is to defend the principle of academic freedom. The freedom to research, consider, discuss and present even the most controversial or potentially divisive issues is a fundamental tenet of academic freedom, and the foundation of the work and mission of the academy. In the same interview, I also made the comment that defending academic freedom is not always easy to do.

The events of last Friday surrounding the "Drawing the Line" student-organized event provide a perfect demonstration of this difficulty. The University received multiple communications both before and after the event from individuals and groups writing either in support of or in opposition to the speaker. The University was variously invited to shut down the event, to silence anticipated protests, to make public statements denouncing the speaker, and to make similar statements denouncing those expressing their opposition to the speaker.

As President I chose to do none of those things. The event was framed and organized as a discussion of political correctness and freedom of speech on campus, which I regard as an important and entirely appropriate topic for discussion at an institution of higher learning. The fundamental mission of the University is to provide opportunities for education, both within and beyond the classroom. Taking the opportunity to listen to a speaker, even one with whom one may vehemently disagree, is an important aspect of education and a cornerstone of academic debate. It has not, therefore, been my approach, nor that of this University, to intervene to shut down events, exclude speakers, or prevent discussion of issues, even where controversial topics are under discussion.

In clearly affirming the commitment of this University to protecting the expression of diverse opinions on our campus, I also want to be absolutely unequivocal in expressing our support for the diversity of our campus community, and our commitment to the rights of minority groups, including trans- and gender-non-conforming members of our community, in particular. I am in no doubt that our University, like our society, is only enriched and strengthened by the diversity of people and opinions on our campus. As such, the presence on campus of a speaker who may challenge the rights of any particular group should not be seen as undermining the University's

commitment to inclusivity but merely as an opportunity to explore and debate the topics under discussion.

Indeed, an important aspect of academic freedom is the willingness and ability to engage with and discuss ideas that might be fundamentally opposed to one's own. It is extremely regrettable that the events of last Friday do not reflect the standard of academic debate that we would aspire to model on our campus but this does not mean that as an institution we should ever seek to limit the right of members of our community and visitors to our campus to engage in peaceful protest. In the event that the tactics employed by such protestors violate the laws of our land, or the codes of conduct of our community, appropriate sanctions can and will be applied, but our commitment to academic freedom requires that, except in the most extreme cases, the cancellation of events, or the exclusion or removal of particular individuals will not be our response.

I would hope that all members of our community are united in our pursuit of knowledge, our belief in the power and importance of education, and our mission to protect the free flow of ideas within an inclusive and respectful environment. As members of the academy, we bear a shared responsibility to reaffirm and uphold the core principles of academic freedom, collegiality, and respect that are fundamental to McMaster and to ensure that our University continues to be a place where respectful debate and discussion can flourish.”

CAMPUS UPDATE

Prime Minister chooses McMaster Students for Budget Day Meeting

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau spent part of budget day meeting with a group of McMaster students, winners of a national competition organized by the federal government. Just a few hours from unveiling their government's fiscal plans, the Prime Minister and Federal Finance Minister Bill Morneau hosted Health Sciences students Krish Bilimoria, Ramachandiran Sethuraman, Matthew Yau and Shangmou Wu and Commerce student Raj Jain on Parliament Hill. The group were the winners of the first Minister of Finance's Post-Secondary Policy Forum.

New Student Residence and Teaching Building to be Named for Peter George

McMaster is naming its new student residence, classroom and activity building the Peter George Centre for Living and Learning. The naming is in recognition of President Emeritus Peter George's transformative leadership as University President and his many contributions to McMaster, Hamilton and higher education in Ontario and Canada. In addition to the naming of the Peter George Centre for Living and Learning, Dr. George was also awarded an honorary doctorate.

Students Approve Landmark Expansion of Activity and Recreation Space

Students have approved a significant expansion and improvement of campus activity and athletic space, including adding nearly 100,000 square feet of fitness studios, study areas, multi-faith and meeting facilities. In a recent referendum, 59% voted in favour of contributing to the construction of a new Student Activity Building, the expansion of the Pulse fitness area and improvements to existing facilities. The new building and the expanded facilities will contribute

to a revitalization of the north end of campus, which is also the site of the Peter George Centre for Living and Learning now under construction.

Kinesiology Student-Athlete Named Canada's Top University Women's Basketball Player

Kinesiology student and Marauders basketball player Danielle Boiago has been named this year's winner of the Nan Copp Award as U SPORTS Women's Basketball Player of the Year. Boiago is the first McMaster student-athlete to win the national honour. Fellow Kinesiology student and Marauders basketball player Vanessa Pickard became just the second Marauder to win the Tracy McLeod Award for her outstanding perseverance in the face of adversity.

Good Student Neighbours Recognized with Community Awards

University and community leaders gathered in MUSC recently to recognize the 2017 winners of the Exceptional Student Neighbour Awards. Each year, McMaster, Hamilton Police Services, the Ainslie Wood/Westdale Community Association and the City of Hamilton present the awards to students who have enhanced the residential communities surrounding campus. The students are nominated by community members, in recognition of being good neighbours.

Research

Ontario Invests more than \$9M in McMaster Research

Two McMaster research projects – one focused on electric vehicles, the other on eye disease – have each received a \$4 million boost from the Ontario Research Fund (ORF). The provincial investment of \$8 million represents a third of the more than \$31 million combined project values. The awards, funded through ORF's Research Excellence stream, support the operational costs of large-scale transformative research of strategic value to the Province.

SSHRC-Funded Project to Help Ensure Indigenous Communities are Equal Partners in Research

Two McMaster researchers have been awarded funding from the federal government's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) for a project aimed at identifying the resources Indigenous peoples need to be equal partners and leaders in social science research within their own communities. Michelle Dion, Associate Professor, Political Science and Chelsea Gabel, Assistant Professor, Health, Aging, and Society, have been awarded one of 28 Knowledge Synthesis Grants as part of SSHRC's Imagining Canada's Future initiative.

Gene Found to Cause Sudden Death in Young People

The gene, called CDH2, causes arrhythmogenic right ventricle cardiomyopathy (ARVC), which is a genetic disorder that predisposes patients to cardiac arrest and is a major cause of unexpected death in seemingly healthy young people. A team of investigators from the Population Health Research Institute of McMaster and Hamilton Health Sciences, led by Dr. Guillaume Paré, performed the genetic sequencing, as well as the bioinformatics analysis for the study.

Teaching and Learning

Grad gives \$350,000 to the Arts & Science Program

Bruce Miyashita, the first graduate of the Arts & Science Program's first cohort, has given \$350,000 to the Program – the largest gift in its history. The gift will provide resources for initiatives such as a forum that will inspire Artsci students to learn more about the business world, while also introducing business leaders to the program's talented students.

Renaissance Award Winners to Study the Perception of Disability and Gender Identity

Two McMaster students will spend the summer learning about the relationship between culture and identity in five different countries around the world. Medical student Kira Gossack-Keenan will travel to India, Cambodia and Vietnam to find out how the region's inhabitants relate to and interact with those with physical disabilities. She'll also study the relationship between disability and art, while producing some artistic works of her own along the way. Tai Jacob, in Arts & Science, will produce a podcast – tentatively titled "Gender Blender" – on the experiences of those going through gender transition. Jacob plans to travel to Toronto, Montreal, New York and Chicago to interview members of those cities' trans communities for the show, which will be available on iTunes.

McMaster Map helps Commemorate 100th Anniversary of Vimy Ridge

A map from McMaster's WWI map collection is part of Souterrain Impressions, a special exhibit now on display at the Canadian National Vimy Memorial in France created to commemorate those who fought in the Battle of Vimy Ridge. The map, a trench map of the area surrounding Vimy Ridge, provides the backdrop for the exhibit, which features 3D reproductions of military crests and insignias carved by Canadian soldiers into the wall of an underground tunnel where they waited – some for weeks on end – for the Battle of Vimy Ridge to begin.

Global and Community Engagement

Helping those Struggling with Food Insecurity

Tina Moffat is working with community partners on a research project aimed at finding ways to assess and improve programs designed to help those struggling with food insecurity, poverty and marginalization in Hamilton. Moffat, an Associate Professor in the Anthropology Department and this year's Scholar-in-Community, is working in partnership with staff and community members at Neighbour 2 Neighbour's Hamilton Community Food Centre to develop a framework to evaluate the Food Centre's programs and identify new ways to support those who either can't afford, or don't have access to, healthy food.

Kinesiology Course Promotes Health and Wellness to Older Adults in Hamilton

Janet Pritchard's fourth year Kinesiology course visited Hamilton's First Place Seniors Residence recently, teaching residents how exercise can be used to manage or help with the progression of age-related diseases. The visit resulted in three tenants joining a falls prevention program and two more joining a residence wellness program.

Halton McMaster Family Health Centre Awarded LEED Gold

McMaster and Joseph Brant Hospital in Burlington have been awarded LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Gold certification for the design and construction of the Halton McMaster Family Health Centre. The building was originally designed to achieve LEED Silver standards, but upon completion of the certification process, the organizations were awarded LEED Gold certification, because of the lasting benefits of the building to the local community and environment.

McMaster Graduate Pioneering Water Quality Innovations

Business graduate Jodi Glover's award-winning company designs and manufactures real-time water quality monitoring sensors and custom software. Real Tech helps detect contaminants, reduce energy and water consumption, protect public health, and minimize the pollution of waterways. Now in their third manufacturing facility, Real Tech products can be found in 50 countries around the world and are empowering people and communities to bring intelligence and control to water.

Student Leads Trip to Local Waterfalls ahead of World Water Day

As part of the *Make 150 Count* campaign, RBC gave \$150 to individuals across the country – including McMaster student Sherry Du – and asked them to do good in their communities. Du gave her funds to the McMaster Water Network Student Chapter, and together with Nature@McMaster, they organized a group outing to some of the city's more than 100 waterfalls. The hikes were intended to get people thinking about their relationship with water, and included discussion about the more than 663 million people around the world currently living without access to a safe water supply.

Newcomer Kitchen

MBA candidate Faizan Ashraf knows a thing or two about being in a new land. Living in several Middle Eastern countries as a child, Ashraf immigrated with his family to Canada from Pakistan in 2014. Ashraf now serves as treasurer of Newcomer Kitchen, which invites Syrian women to cook a weekly meal and socialize, then sell the meal to provide income.

Anthropology Students in Search of Art

A group of McMaster Anthropology students took to the streets of Hamilton armed with cell phones, cameras, tablets, pens and paper to explore and document the street art in five West Harbour neighbourhoods. This community exploration was part of Rebecca Plett's fourth-year Anthropology course *Practicing Anthropology: Ethics, Theory, Engagement*, designed to give students hands-on experience conducting research using anthropological methodologies to investigate social problems, and how these methods can be applied to positively impact society.