The Civic Mission of the Academy: An Update on McMaster’s Community Engagement Activities

We will acknowledge, and seek to integrate in all our work and in ways appropriate to our specific fields, an obligation to serve the greater good of our community—locally, nationally, and globally (Principle 7, Forward with Integrity, 2011)

Community engagement has long been a part of McMaster’s history but in recent times we have been working at an institutional level to consolidate and deepen that engagement, to focus more deliberately on our civic mission, and to integrate this work fully and meaningfully into the academic and research life of the University. Since one of our stated institutional goals has been to enhance the connections between McMaster and the communities we serve, locally, provincially, nationally, and around the globe, I thought it appropriate to provide Board Members with an update on our progress.

The establishment of the Network for Community Campus Partnerships in 2013, was a crucial first step in bringing together community involved representatives from across the University to coordinate their work and develop a more strategic approach to community engagement. Acting as advisors, knowledge brokers, and facilitators, the members of the Network have been hugely successful in strengthening partnerships across the campus and externally, developing best practices for this work, promoting dialogue and collaboration, and sponsoring and supporting community-engaged events and initiatives. In June 2015, the Network launched a strategic planning exercise, which resulted in McMaster’s first community engagement strategy, setting the direction for this work for the five-year period from 2016-2021. The strategy is built on a clear vision, mission, and principles, was developed with the input of hundreds of community and campus partners, and identifies specific goals and objectives intended to support our local community and work together for an inclusive, sustainable greater Hamilton.

The formation of the Office of Community Engagement in 2016 was a further tangible step in recognizing and formalizing McMaster’s commitment as an active and principled partner in our community. Guided by its Director, Sheila Sammon, the work of the Office of Community Engagement is focused on the principle that “relationships build communities” and recognizes that strong reciprocal relationships take time and effort to build and maintain. The Office has worked hard to facilitate and support the work of the Network, build capacity to support community partners, reduce the barriers to partnership development, and share information and resources.

The success of this relationship-based approach is evidenced by the diverse array of projects and initiatives that are underway across our community, as well as the quality of the partnerships and relationships that are being developed. Projects range from Community-Campus CoLaboratory, a social innovation lab looking at issues of food insecurity, accessible mobility, and digital literacy, to the McMaster Research Shop, which enables student Research Associates to support community partners by undertaking plain language research reviews, to Change Camp Hamilton,
which hosts annual events aimed at introducing students to the Hamilton community and fostering an ongoing, action-oriented conversation on community partnerships, and collaboration. The enthusiasm of McMaster students for this work is reflected in the increasing numbers applying for the Community Engagement Foundations Course, co-taught by faculty from the Schools of Interdisciplinary Science and Social Work, and intended to expose students to the complexity of community work and provide the initial skills necessary for effective and ethical community engagement.

It is also extremely gratifying to observe the range of community engaged research, education, and service activities that take place across the campus, in academic and administrative units alike. The McMaster Discovery Program, run by the Arts and Science Program, provides a free, university-level learning opportunity to adults living in Hamilton who have experienced barriers to higher education, while the McMaster Athletes Care (M.A.C.) program mobilizes 800 varsity student-athletes in a variety of community projects using sport as a tool to make a positive impact in the lives of at-risk youth. Events as diverse as the Gandhi Peace Festival, the Municipal Advocacy Week run by the McMaster Student Union, the TMG and Facility Services Days of Service, and the Open Doors Hamilton event, which this year included McMaster’s Nuclear Reactor, are further evidence of the variety and extent of the rich connections between our campus and the broader community of which we are a part.

On December 4, CityLAB Hamilton will be formally launched. Conceived as a partnership between McMaster, Mohawk College, Redeemer College and the City of Hamilton, CityLAB is an innovation hub intended to bring together student, academic, and civic leaders to co-create a better Hamilton for all. This initiative is a fine example of the progress we have made, and the shift in campus culture that the Network for Community Campus Partnerships and the Office of Community Engagement have been able to achieve over what is still a relatively short period of time.

The Office of Community Engagement has recently published its 2016-2017 annual report (available at http://community.mcmaster.ca), which provides a wealth of examples of the various initiatives underway. I am delighted to welcome Sheila Sammon, Director of Community Engagement, and Dave Heidebrecht, Manager, Officer of Community Engagement, as the guest speakers at our meeting and look forward to hearing them speak in more detail about the work they are engaged in, and the principles that underpin and guide our civic mission and community engagement efforts.

CAMPUS UPDATE

L.R. Wilson Hall Celebration and Launch of McMaster’s Socrates Project

The opening of L.R. Wilson Hall was celebrated recently with a ceremony that incorporated artistic and cultural performances, experiential learning, and the work of students, alumni, faculty and staff. At the ceremony, Chancellor Emeritus, L.R. (Red) Wilson announced a $2M gift to launch the Socrates Project, a two-year campus-wide pilot project drawing on the University’s strengths and expertise in liberal arts education and research, especially in the study of the humanities and social sciences. The project will showcase, foster and promote the critical
thinking, communication, creativity, civic engagement and collaboration skills needed to develop deeply engaged citizens and leaders.

**McMaster named a Top Employer in the Hamilton-Niagara Region**
McMaster has been named one of Hamilton-Niagara’s Top Employers for the third year in a row. An annual competition run by the editors of Canada’s Top 100 Employers, Hamilton-Niagara’s Top Employers is a juried designation that recognizes employers who lead their industries in offering exceptional places to work.

**Global University Employability Rankings**
McMaster ranked fifth in Canada and 74th worldwide (up one spot from 2016), in the Times Higher Education Global University Employability Ranking 2017. Around 6,000 employers and recruiters from 22 countries participated, with the rankings focusing on the need to equip graduates to work in a fast-moving, rapidly changing digital world.

**Research**

**McMaster named Canada's most Research-Intensive University**
McMaster continues to lead in university rankings – this time being recognized as Canada’s most research-intensive university in the recently released 2017 Research Infosource rankings. With a total research income of $354.6 million, up from $324.6 million last year, McMaster outpaced its peers in research-intensity, averaging $405,300 per faculty member – more than double the national average. The University also placed first in three additional Research Infosource rankings – one measuring research-intensity per graduate student, topping more than $81,000 per student; and two related to corporate income.

**Ten McMaster Researchers awarded Canada Research Chairs**
Recognized as leaders in their fields, ten McMaster researchers have been awarded $8.6 million from the Canada Research Chairs (CRC) Program to further their work, improve Canada’s international competitiveness, and train the next generation of leaders.

McMaster’s six new Canada Research Chairs are:

**Emily Cranston, Associate Professor, Chemical Engineering** – Dr. Cranston is the Canada Research Chair in Bio-Based Nanomaterials (Tier 2). She uses biological components to develop environmentally friendly, high-performance and advanced materials from renewable resources such as wood pulp, with a focus on using nanocellulose.

**Chelsea Gabel, Assistant Professor, Health, Aging and Society** – Dr. Gabel is the Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Well-Being, Community Engagement and Innovation (Tier 2). She is partnering with Indigenous communities to explore and address health and well-being issues, and examine the impact of digital technology in these communities, with the goal of finding ways to improve the quality of life among Indigenous communities and across many generations.

**Jeremy Hirota, Assistant Professor, Medicine** – Dr. Hirota is the Canada Research Chair in Respiratory Mucosal Immunology (Tier 2). He is using translational research methods to explore the role of ATP-binding cassette (ABC) transporters in mucosal immunology, ultimately
contributing to the development of new and innovative treatments of respiratory diseases such as asthma.

Jonathan Schertzer, Assistant Professor, Biochemistry and Biomedical Sciences – Dr. Schertzer is the Canada Research Chair in Metabolic Inflammation (Tier 2). He uses experimental and preclinical methods to understand the links between immune and metabolic systems, to improve existing treatments, and lead to the development of new treatments for obesity-related metabolic diseases such as pre-diabetes and type 2 diabetes.

Ryan Van Lieshout, Assistant Professor, Psychiatry and Behavioural Neuroscience – Dr. Van Lieshout is the Canada Research Chair in the Perinatal Programming of Mental Disorders (Tier 2). His research applies observational and experimental methods to examine pre- and early post-natal stressors and their impact on brain development, to provide a better understanding of how psychiatric disorders develop.

Mike Waddington, Professor, Geography and Earth Sciences – Dr. Waddington is the Canada Research Chair in Ecohydrology (Tier 1). He conducts field research experiments and laboratory studies to examine how drought and wildfire severity impact peatland ecosystems, with the goal of understanding the impact of climate change and developing innovative ecosystem restoration technologies for damaged ecosystems.

Four existing McMaster Canada Research Chairholders were also successful in having their chairs advanced or renewed:

Megan Brickley - Canada Research Chair in Bioarcheology of Human Disease (Tier 1 renewal)
Rick Hackett - Canada Research Chair in Organizational Behaviour and Human Performance (Tier 1 renewal)
Maureen Markle-Reid - Canada Research Chair in Person-Centred Interventions for Older Adults with Multimorbidity and their Caregivers (Tier 2 renewal)
Sheila Singh - Canada Research Chair in Human Brain Cancer Stem Cell Biology (Tier 1 – advanced from Tier 2)

McMaster Post-Doctoral Fellow wins Polanyi Prize
Dr. Sarah Svenningsen, a Post-Doctoral Fellow with McMaster’s Department of Medicine and Western’s Robarts Research Institute, has been named one of this year's winners of the prestigious John Charles Polanyi Prize. The $20,000 award recognizes researchers in the early stages of their careers in Physics, Chemistry, Physiology or Medicine, Literature and Economic Science. Dr. Svenningsen is currently investigating the potential for MRI to improve the delivery of bronchial thermoplasty, used to treat those with severe asthma

McMaster Researcher Honoured for work on Obesity and Diabetes
Dr. Gregory Steinberg, Professor of Medicine, has been awarded the Diabetes Canada/Canadian Institutes of Health Research – Institute of Nutrition Metabolism and Diabetes Young Scientist Award. This award recognizes outstanding research conducted in Canada by scientists under the age of 45 in the field of diabetes. Dr. Steinberg also received the Richard E. Weitzman Outstanding Early Career Investigator Award from the Endocrine Society in September, an annual award which recognizes an exceptionally promising young clinical or basic investigator in the field of endocrinology.
Global and Community Engagement

McMaster Hosts Major Conference on Health and Exercise
In an age of information overload and conflicting health news, McMaster’s leading exercise and health researchers—together with some of North America’s highest profile health journalists and authors—are participating in a free public event on the science behind cardiovascular, skeletal and brain health. *Just the Facts Please: An Exercise in Achieving Optimal Health* takes place on December 6 at McMaster Innovation Park.

Innovation and the Future of Canada Summit
The DeGroote School of Business hosted the Innovation and the Future of Canada Summit in Toronto on November 16. The event featured thinkers and doers from around the world, including from IBM, McKinsey and IGM – as well as government input from representatives including Navdeep Bains, Minister of Innovation, Science, and Economic Development and MP for Mississauga–Malton.

Teaching and Learning

Engineering Graduates win Dyson Award for Skin Cancer-Detecting Device
What started as a final year engineering class project at McMaster is now an internationally recognized improved solution for the early detection of melanoma, the most dangerous form of skin cancer. Michael Takla, Rotimi Fadiya, Prateek Mathur and Shivad Bhavsar, all graduates of McMaster’s Electrical and Biomedical Engineering program, have received the prestigious James Dyson Award and $50K to support the development of the sKan, the team’s skin cancer detection device. The sKan was one of only two Canadian projects that made the shortlist of 20 finalists, selected from over 1,000 entries from 23 countries by a panel of Dyson engineers. Named after the renowned British inventor, the James Dyson award celebrates, encourages and inspires the next generation of design engineers.