

McMASTER UNIVERSITY
STRATEGIC RESEARCH PLAN
September 2008

Introduction

The role of universities in the 21st century extends far beyond traditional knowledge creation and dissemination to encompass new expectations for innovations that will have broader, social and economic benefits. As a research-intensive university, McMaster is committed and well-poised to play a leading role in the economic development of Canada and, equally important, its social and cultural fabric.

Over that last decade, McMaster has, together with substantive investments by Federal and Provincial Governments and the private sector, continued to build world-class infrastructure and critical mass. Building on our research strengths, McMaster has acquired world-competitive facilities, attracted and retained researchers of promise and stature, spawned new leading edge cross-disciplinary training programs and expanded its collaborations and partnerships within the academic, public and private sectors. These investments now offer many opportunities; equally exciting and challenging, with timing being crucial.

Our vision, mission and strategic directions continue to evolve, reflecting the expanding and critical role of Canadian universities in creating a productive, internationally competitive economy through progressive training programs and critical partnerships. Our strategy enables McMaster to be fully engaged in addressing and tackling challenges stemming from changes in the global environment. This is demonstrated by the progressive steps taken within defined areas of strategic priorities to pursue new opportunities, among them, water ecology and health, arts and technology, clean and sustainable energy, including nuclear and transportation. These initiatives were made possible through investments at all levels of the University, while at the same time reflecting new emerging areas.

As already noted, our strategic areas have been the launching pad for new research ideas, approaches and opportunities aimed at creating new knowledge and the next generation of highly qualified people (HQP). These HQP will be able to translate and apply their training as well as resulting research innovations to the well-being and productivity of local and regional communities, and to the nation at large within the global context.

The defining characteristic of McMaster University which underlies all of its planning processes and documents is research intensity. This Strategic Research Plan (SRP) defines McMaster's broad research directions and areas of strategic priority thereby providing the context for institutional research applications and investments. The University continues to review its strategic priority areas to ensure they embody, transparently, directions and opportunities that emerge, yet retain the flexibility essential to be able respond to opportunities presented by an every changing research landscape, internationalization objectives, HQP needs and demands by all sectors; public, private and not-for-profit.

Planning Framework

McMaster University began its strategic planning in 1995 with a blueprint document *Directions* under the leadership of the President and in consultation with the University community and planning bodies. This foundational document has defined to date McMaster's vision, direction and its contribution to society in the 21st Century – achieving international distinction for creativity, innovation and excellence.

Directions continued to be the central guiding document upon which companion planning and implementation documents, *Directions II, III* and the *Academic Plan*, emerged. The next strategic planning process began in September 2002 and culminated with the document "*Refining Directions*" which identifies an adaptive, dynamic planning framework capable of maintaining its relevance through the foreseeable changes in the university environment. *Refining Directions*, identified McMaster's goals and targets as:

- To achieve the next level in research results and reputation by building on existing and emerging areas of excellence
 - Target: To be consistently among the top three Ontario universities in terms of the quality of students we attract and graduate from our undergraduate and graduate programs as measured by appropriate indicators.
- To attract and retain highly-qualified students by making discovery the centre of the learning experience
 - Targets: (1) To be consistent among the top three Canadian universities as measured by appropriate indicators of research excellence and (2) To increase the importance of graduate education so that McMaster's graduate population reaches 20% of the University's total full-time enrolment and is highly ranked in indicators of graduate educational excellence.

- To build a community with a shared purpose.
 - Target: To ensure that all members of the McMaster community feel recognized and valued for their contributions to this shared purpose

Key Objectives of University's Strategic Research Plan (SRP):

The objectives of McMaster's SRP remain unchanged and are to:

- Build on our strengths and seize new opportunities to achieve (world-class) excellence in selected research areas;
- Help achieve institutional academic goals such as the promotion of inter-disciplinary research and the integration of research and teaching;
- Strengthen and expand existing undergraduate and graduate programs, and develop innovative new programs, to attract high-quality students and increase enrolment of postgraduate trainees in the identified areas of research thrust;
- Protect our investment in areas of strategic importance by recruiting and retaining excellent faculty whose efforts are key to our long-term strategic plans;
- Capitalize on the diverse range of funding opportunities and partnerships, particularly with our affiliated hospitals, to realize integrated capital, infrastructure and faculty renewal objectives;
- Develop the capacity for effective knowledge transfer to maximize the benefit of research to society and
- Foster collaborations and building of research partnerships nationally and internationally.

Institutional Strategic Areas of Priority

The guiding principles for the selection of strategic areas included research excellence, multi – and inter-disciplinarity and the potential to forge effective links between research strengths and student and societal demand. These strategic areas are not mutually exclusive and are intended to inform priorities in research and teaching, AT both the undergraduate and graduate levels. The University has invested heavily in these areas through new faculty and staff appointments, student support, capital improvements to relevant facilities and promotion of strategic research initiatives, including strategic emerging fields. The six (6) strategic areas identified through extensive consultations reflect core strengths and ambitions that will remain indicative of long-term potential and relevance and, together with Faculty priorities such as stem cell and infectious diseases research, will continue to direct institutional initiatives and investments.

The six (6) multi-disciplinary (cross-Faculty) strategic areas resulting from Strategic Planning Exercises are:

- Molecular Biology
- Integrated Health Research
- Information Technology
- Globalization and the Human Condition
- Work and Society
- Science-based Innovation in Manufacturing (and Materials).

Strategic Research Plans cannot be static but must take into account the need for flexibility in order to respond to changing environments and societal demands, both at home and abroad. The ongoing review of our strategic priority areas ensures they embody the leading edge research grounded, and interfaced where feasible, within these areas, as well as with opportunities that emerge. The identification of "emerging areas" allows the University to recognize and respond to evolution opportunities and promising areas of strength. Another important element of our strategic research plans is the establishment of McMaster's Innovation Park (MIP), a vehicle for supporting R&D in key industrial areas, thereby facilitating and accelerating knowledge transfer and the impact of outcomes from recognized research strengths.

Brief Description of Strategic Research Areas:

Molecular Biology: Our emphasis on molecular biology is broad-based and fundamental to the support of research excellence in health, biomedical, life and environmental sciences. This thrust includes investigations of mechanisms of fundamental molecular processes (such as signaling and transcription), application of molecular

knowledge and techniques to the design of innovative therapeutic agents, and problems in environmental toxicology, forensics and evolutionary theory.

In recent years, our research strengths in this area have resulted in the establishment of the Center for Microbial Chemical Biology, the Center for Functional Genomics, Center for Microbial Chemical Biology and Insight: The Centre for Advanced Ophthalmic Materials which draw upon the expertise and facilities that are part of the Science-based Innovation of Manufacturing (and Materials) strategic areas such as the Canadian Centre for Electron Microscopy (CCEM), the Center for Advanced Polymer Processing and Design, the Center for Electrophotonic Materials and Devices.

With increasing frequency this area of strength intersects with one or more of our other strategic areas with collaborations between physical scientists, health scientists and engineers at the core. One such example is in the research program dedicated to understanding the biological/materials interface and which has enormous and broad implications ranging such as contact lenses, blood contacting materials and diagnostic test strips. This program reflects the evolution of such as initiatives as noted above and draws upon their resources an expertise.

Integrated Health Research: Integrated health research has evolved as a new area of strategic priority replacing the more narrowly defined Environment and Health. Our strategic research thrust in integrated health is interdisciplinary in nature and brings together a broad range of fundamental and applied research strength with the objective of advancing the quality of health services for the benefit of society. In building on strength, we are investing in the further development of biomedical engineering, medical imaging, medical devices, neuroscience, systems and diagnostic techniques, health economics and policy analysis, health management and health care delivery. A pilot initiative – Collaborations for Health, a university-wide program - advances this strategic research area through three broad thematic areas: Health and the Environment, Health Services and Policy and Development across the Lifespan.

Among recent investments in this area are the creation of the McMaster Institute for Music and the Mind (MIMM) and the McMaster Institute for Neurosciences Discovery and Study (MINDS). Both institutes are designed to breakthrough conventional boundaries that inhibit leading-edge, interdisciplinary research and study. The establishment of the School of Biomedical Engineering reflects the synergy between this strategic area and the Science-based Innovation in Manufacturing (and Materials). Integrated Health Research and Information Technology together represent opportunities to advance the development of surgical robotics technology. The collective talents and expertise of neurosciences, software engineers and digital media present opportunities to advance brain functions research in the context of public policy regarding intervention and treatment. The recently established M.G. deGroote Institute for Infectious Disease is a cornerstone for pursuing inter-disciplinary research spanning human and microbial genomics, infectious disease modeling and molecular biology, reflecting the cell to society approach.

Information Technology: To date, a primary emphasis has been in Engineering, specifically, Electrical and Computer Engineering and the Department of Computing and Software where there has been a significant influx of new faculty in recent years. Another critical focus is on fostering research strength in multimedia in the Faculty of Humanities. More recently, the University has been promoting and facilitating the linkages of these areas of expertise to create a critical mass able to address collectively and more effectively current limits in virtual environments, communications, simulations and gaming for example. With the 2005 establishment of the School of Computational Engineering and Science connecting engineering, science, mathematics and computer science to create new, powerful tools for real-world discovery and understanding, the University has a head start in pursuing multidisciplinary research and education programs presented by new technological opportunities and needs.

Work and Society: This strategic area examines the impact of social, economic and demographic variables on workers and their workplaces. Examples include investigations of occupational health and safety, women and work in the health sector, social policy influences on health and labour economics and, more recently, development of human capital through the educational systems, including associated education and health public policy. This research thrust encompasses investigators in Social Sciences, Humanities, Business and Health Sciences. Formal research entities in this strategic area include the McMaster Centre for Work in a Global Society, the McMaster Research Centre for the Promotion of Women's Health, the Canadian International Labour Network and the Centre for Health Economics and Policy Analysis.

Globalization and the Human Condition: This strategic area, which supports research on the influence of globalization phenomena on the human condition, consists of several McMaster researchers located primarily in the Faculties of Social Sciences and Humanities. The area supports the interdisciplinary McMaster Research Institute on Globalization and the Human Condition. Areas of investigation include culture, social welfare, community identity and economic trade and development.

Science-based Innovation in Manufacturing (and Materials): This strategic area was created to foster synergies between our already internationally-recognized strengths in both manufacturing and materials. This area encompasses researchers primarily in Engineering, Science and Business and includes the Brockhouse Institute for Materials Research, the Centre for Electrophotonic Materials and Devices, the Intelligent Machines and Manufacturing Research Centre, the McMaster Manufacturing Research Institute, the McMaster Institute for Polymer Production Technology, the Computer-aided Polymer Process Analysis and Design Group and the McMaster Advanced Control Consortium. The central aim of this strategic area is to understand and optimize the process leading from the design of new materials to their manufacturing and application for example in the automotive (lighter, non-corrosive materials and more fuel efficient systems) and energy sectors (energy efficient photovoltaic devices, alternative, clean technology and advanced nuclear systems).

Integration of priorities within the McMaster community

In addition to the university-wide strategic planning process, each Faculty implemented its own process to identify specific priority areas. Faculty priorities were informed both by the institutional strategic directions and by the key strengths and interests within the Faculties. The result is a cohesive and natural integration of university and Faculty focus, often with initiatives that span a number of our identified priority areas. Decisions regarding investment in research and academic activities are grounded in our institutional and Faculty strategic directions. Existing and planned initiatives include support for human capital, infrastructure, graduate and undergraduate training as well as alignment with or creation of complementary institutes and centres, many of which are inter-disciplinary or cross-disciplinary in nature.

Building Research Capacity

McMaster University's research enterprise has experienced significant growth through critical institutional, government and private sector investments. This growth reflects our strong competitive pursuit of new research opportunities built upon research strengths, commitment to the development of innovative training strategies and stakeholder collaborations spanning community, regional, national and international partnerships.

Our institution-wide and faculty-specific strategic directions provide the framework for institutional research and infrastructure applications, institutional resource allocations (e.g. faculty appointments and capital expenditures) and for ongoing fundraising. McMaster University and its affiliated hospitals use an integrated approach to opportunities provided by partnership and strategic programs such as the Canada Research Chairs (CRC), Canada Excellence Research Chairs (CERC), Networks of Centres of Excellence programs, Ontario Centres of Excellence and Ontario Research Fund initiatives. These new and vital opportunities allow us to sustain and further enhance our areas of research strength as well as engage in inter-disciplinary, cross-disciplinary and multi-institutional research initiatives. McMaster and its hospital partners strive to capitalize on their collective strengths to develop collaborative research both regionally and more broadly (e.g., with other institutions within Canada and abroad. CFI, in particular, has spawned several multi-institutional initiatives which could not have otherwise developed.

A number of strategies are employed to capitalize on the federal and provincial programs. For example, institutional priority for CFI applications is given to those research programs which most closely align with one or more of McMaster's strategic directions and take into account Federal and Provincial science and technology priorities. Further, emphasis is placed on coordinating CRC, as well as CERC, applications with major institutional initiatives to maximize the positive impact on the University's research enterprise. Many of our institutional research initiatives, including CFI applications, are led by or include CRC award holders and are aligned with groundbreaking and/or expanding training and educational initiatives. Finally, the research thrusts to which appointments are made through CRCs, endowed or industrial Chairs and, in the future, CERCs reflect ongoing academic planning which is guided by the key institutional goals and realized through strategic planning within departments and faculties.

The CRC program, as well as other chair investments, allows our research-intensive university to build upon and

advance research strength in foundational areas essential to a broad range of research activities. As such, some of our Chair appointments may not be directly related to a specifically-defined strategic area. One such example is mathematics, a foundational discipline that plays a key role in many scholarly areas of inquiry. Our faculty in the Department of Mathematics and Statistics collaborate with researchers in fields ranging from epidemiology to theoretical physics and materials. Chair appointments, including CRCs, are an important resource for expanding and sustaining excellence in mathematics even though this field is not identified as a specific institutional strategic area.

McMaster's CRCs – Current Status and Planning & Approval Process

Planning for the allocation of CRCs is driven by the Faculties within an overarching institutional framework developed by the Senior Academic officers and subsequently approved by the senior academic planning body at McMaster, the University Planning Committee (UPC). CRC's are allocated to Faculties proportional to the funding secured by each faculty from the Federal Agencies. Each Faculty develops a plan to allocate CRCs in accordance with identified research thrusts. These plans are then reviewed and endorsed at the institutional level. Flexibility is built into this CRC process to allow for emerging opportunities that arise throughout the life of the program.

Nominations for faculty with clinical or cross-appointments with affiliated teaching hospitals are consistent with established mutual priorities. External recruitment for clinical faculty is performed in conjunction with clinical program leaders and in consultation with the relevant teaching hospital.

McMaster is committed to actively seeking qualified candidates from under-represented groups and will take additional steps to address imbalances that may occur throughout our CRC nominations processes. In particular, McMaster is committed to achieving our objective of 25% female representation in our initial nominations as well as our CRC renewals.

Research Training

Graduate education is central to research intensity at McMaster University. In our latest university-wide strategic plan (*Refining Directions*) increasing graduate enrolment to 20% of the total university enrolment (from the current 13%) was identified as a major goal. As a research-intensive university, this is a necessary and important ambition for McMaster. Higher graduate enrolments are targeted among programs that are high quality, nationally and internationally recognized and inter-disciplinary programs which are consistent with the University's areas of strategic priority. Demonstration of the importance of the University's training role, recruitment of the best of the best and the provision of a broad range of resources towards training (undergraduate, graduate and postdoctoral) is the creation of the position of Associate Vice-President & Dean in the School of Graduate Studies. This position extends the resources of the School to the training environment at large, while complementary and aligned with the research objectives of the University.

Knowledge and Technology Transfer

McMaster University is recognized and ranked nationally as a first-class research and educational institution. To support the research enterprise, McMaster has invested heavily into services to assist researchers in knowledge transfer activities, including commercialization of research results through the McMaster Industrial Liaison Office, membership in the C4 consortium (Southwest Ontario's Technology Transfer Community) and the creation of the McMaster Innovation Park (MIP). MIP is designed to be a regional incubator hot bed, aimed at supporting, promoting and facilitating early-stage companies. McMaster has partnered with city, regional, provincial and national stakeholders with a focus on economic development activities to capitalize particularly on biotechnology and materials developments. These initiatives, together with a unique set of policies covering intellectual property management and inclusive of all work conducted with our affiliated hospitals, equip the University and our hospital partners with the ability to execute knowledge and technology transfer and commercialization in collaboration with our industry partners. Equally notable, the University has invested strategically in Hamilton's capacity for supporting and nurturing such initiatives through significant expansion of our industrial liaison staffing.