A REPORT BY THE TASK FORCE

ON FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR THE

FACULTIES OF HUMANITIES, SOCIAL SCIENCES AND SCIENCE

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Prologue

The essence of the mandate given by the Provost to this Task Force, and articulated in the letter from the Deans of the Faculties of Humanities, Social Sciences and Science was to ensure that the three Faculties were well positioned to respond to the changing undergraduate, graduate and research demands of the twenty-first century (see Appendix 1). These three Faculties are contributors to the prominence that McMaster enjoys as one of the top 100 universities in the world according to the 2015 Shanghai Top 300 World Index of Universities, ranked 4th among Canadian universities on that index. The research and educational strengths of the three Faculties are therefore critical to sustaining the prominence of McMaster University as a high-ranking world-class university. These strengths underline the importance for the whole university of the mandate that has been entrusted to the Task Force.

McMaster has many strengths upon which to build in responding to the above mandate. As a leading research-intensive university we have an established track record in both highly specialized areas of research, and multidisciplinary research and institutes. We need to ensure that the financial and administrative supports and processes are in place to maintain the performance of the researchers and their teams who are the engines of this success. Regarding pedagogical models, we have been pioneers as demonstrated, for example, in the creation of approaches such as Problem Based Learning, and in the design and educational philosophy of the Arts and Science Program.

Dr. Suzanne Fortier, former president of the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and current President of McGill University, recently remarked that the central mission of the university is “how to think, how to make leaps in knowledge, how to have imagination and rigour at the same time.” She further noted that universities will have to prepare students for multiple career changes and a longer working life, a situation that demands of students a “constant reinvention of themselves.” Consequently, Fortier suggests, “we need to prepare them for that world.” Are we well positioned to facilitate the emergence of “leaps of knowledge” while, at the same time, preserving and reinvigorating ancient or traditional knowledge? Are we well positioned to prepare our students for the constant reinvention of themselves and multiple careers that lie ahead for them? These are questions we will address below, seeking to identify issues or barriers at McMaster that may stand in the way of achieving these objectives, while also highlighting opportunities and potential solutions to these barriers. We will then lay out scenarios of how different structural arrangements may affect the outcomes anticipated from the proposed solutions.

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While our mandate was to focus on the three Faculties, it has become clear that many of the issues and solutions identified in our report are of importance for the entire university.

What should we be offering students?

Student education, in particular undergraduate education, proved to be the most significant problem that emerged from our consultations. In order to best assess the challenges faced by students at McMaster due to structures and programs in our Faculties, along with the dynamic situation described above, the Task Force found it useful to ask what kinds of students we wish to graduate from Humanities, Social Sciences and Science. Which attributes should be cultivated, attributes that indicate whether a student’s time at McMaster has been a success? We believe that all our students should, in one way or another, have acquired certain core competencies, and have been exposed to multiple disciplines in a way that fosters an interdisciplinary awareness. Core competencies must include (but are not limited to) cultural literacy, numeracy, critical thinking skills, a student’s self-awareness of her or his place in our broader society and the world, and the ability to communicate effectively across a number of different media, including writing and speaking. More specifically, some of the qualities and abilities that we believe strong disciplinary and interdisciplinary programming at McMaster should aim to cultivate and instill in our students should include:

- Vibrant intellectual engagement and growth, prioritizing curiosity, creativity, imagination, discipline, and free play of the mind
- A well-rounded, holistic view of the world in its great complexity, and the student’s place in it
- Awareness of local and global communities, the global human condition, and the multiple pressures placed on the planet by natural processes and human practices
- The ability to reflect critically on human values, principles, and ethics from a framework committed to justice, human welfare, and a more equitable view of the world and its future
- Strong interpersonal working skills rooted in empathy and the ability to listen to others
- Strong communication skills
- Collaborative and leadership skills
- The ability to be self-directed when necessary
- Adaptability to multiple careers and roles in our society
- The ability to approach and critically evaluate problems from a variety of viewpoints
- The ability to grasp and assemble information and arguments from a variety of sources, combined with the capacity to engage this material in a critical, yet creative manner
- Firm grounding in a student’s chosen discipline, instilling the knowledge of concepts, approaches, applications, limitations and assumptions necessary to enter fruitfully into the discipline after leaving McMaster
In order to achieve success in graduating such students, the programs we offer must be flexible enough to allow students not only to delve deeply into one discipline, but also to engage a range of disciplines in a way that promotes the core competencies just mentioned, and allows students to explore areas of special interest to them. This requires increased institutional support and encouragement to cross disciplinary and Faculty borders.

**Existing impediments to achieving the goals outlined above**

The Task Force was charged with identifying structural and programmatic impediments to students achieving these goals while at McMaster, specifically as they exist between the Faculties of Humanities, Social Sciences and Science. Many of these impediments spring from a number of inter-related, systemic issues.

Since well before the activity-based New Budget Model (NBM) was instituted, arguably there has been excessive competition among Faculties, as the Task Force was made aware repeatedly in several interviews with people well positioned to speak on the matter. In one sense, this is entirely natural and to be expected in any environment with limited resources and many competing demands, as in our University. It is beyond the purview of the Task Force to explain the reasons for this excessive competition fully, leading to what many of late call disciplinary ‘silos’, but it surely includes the measurements of success for Faculties and departments established by the University administration in the past. Numbers are counted, spreadsheets are scoured, and this, too, is reasonable and to be expected. However, these metrics have clearly had some calcifying effect on Faculty (and department) structures over time, such that there are high levels of structural, programmatic, and, in the final analysis, individual resistance to collaboration among Faculties and even departments. The important point for our purposes is the many and various ways in which this basic impulse is *made manifest to students*. Faculties and departments want to hang on to students, who, unbeknownst to them, are seen as basic income units. In interviews with assistant deans, in particular, it became apparent that many small barriers have been set in place over several decades to impede students being able to explore their interests in the University. These barriers may make it difficult for McMaster to maintain its competitiveness at a time when the University is trying to strengthen and consolidate its image as a leading educational institution in Canada. Some of these barriers will be discussed further below.

Enter the NBM. The Task Force heard wildly different evaluations of the model, ranging from absolutely benign to patently malignant. Time will tell which opinion is the more correct, but it may be observed that the most resolute proponents of the model highlighted the way in which Faculties are now given greater encouragement to teach students from other Faculties, because of the 100% tuition payment received for having such students in the class. Consequently, the NBM can be seen as a positive move toward interdisciplinary possibilities for students. It does indeed fix one end of the problem, making a given Faculty keenly interested in getting students from other Faculties to take their courses. What it does not address is the other end of the problem, the fact that any given Faculty will just as decidedly not want to give up those students to the other
Faculties in the first place. Which of these different attitudes one takes toward the NBM might, therefore, depend upon which side of this motivational problem one is highlighting. Ideally, this would not be a problem if student flows were even in both directions, as there would be no significant advantage (or disadvantage) to any given Faculty. It may also be why some administrators are perplexed that more cross-Faculty teaching is not occurring as expected or hoped.

A closely-related issue, with a major impact on student choice and mobility between Faculties and departments, has been a slow creep of program and disciplinary requirements over the decades, and indeed, the very way in which a student’s education and experience at the University is cast within a rigidly disciplinary framework. This lack of freedom is mostly an issue at the undergraduate level but may also affect some graduate programs, especially those that are interdisciplinary in nature and require students to take courses in other Faculties. This lack of mobility appears from the very beginning of a student’s experience at the University, where at the application stage she or he is defined according to a designated Faculty and, in some cases, to a specific discipline. In the case of undergraduate students, the presumed reasoning for keeping them within a discipline/Faculty is the high number of core requirements (and various entry standards) for programs. The result, however, is distressingly a minimal number of inter- or multi-disciplinary course options for our students. Thus, the message to students is set early, and often reinforced along their journey at McMaster: The institution is structured to prevent, not promote, broad learning, cross-Faculty exposure, and the exploration of academic interests. The effect is that a student “belongs” to a tiny slice of the University, and has little – in some cases almost no – opportunity to discover the many wonders of the University while here. All of this actively stifles the necessary goals laid out above, in the first sections of our report.

The impact of Faculty (and department) structures, together with NBM, has also increased disciplinary resistance to creating new interdisciplinary graduate streams. Departments are committed to managing their programs as funds are based on student counts. The current environment provides no incentive in exploring financial costs/benefits for cross-Faculty collaborations, as units are discouraged from committing new resources that do not increase their revenue. All of this may have a negative impact on McMaster in the future, as the province is becoming more selective in supporting graduate programs that are of cutting-edge and innovative in nature.

There are concerns on the research front as well. Much of the research in Science and in some areas of Social Science is carried out by graduate students. With any decline in graduate numbers, which is a concern for the University, research productivity may be negatively impacted. Also, high-quality infrastructure is expensive and requires cost sharing among Faculties to keep them up-to-date and to operate.

A factor that clearly exacerbates the issues laid forth above is the chronic budget problems in all three of the Faculties (even if one is doing better than the other two at present). In the Task
Force’s deliberations, this issue was often connected with discussions of cross-subsidization across other parts of the University. The three Faculties are in an almost constant state of scrambling for sufficient funds, and this amidst a troubling, morale-deflating broader public narrative that views non-profitable disciplines – especially those concentrated in our three Faculties – as second-rate and expendable. It is to be expected, then, that these three Faculties will adopt a “bunker mentality” that seeks to hang on to every possible resource while any sharing of resources is actively discouraged. The predictable result is, again, that students will often be turned back inward to their Faculty when seeking to explore new areas, rather than encouraged to seek out such opportunities. Space is not created for such exploration, and doorways between Faculties, departments, and programs are, on the whole, kept shut or made difficult to pass through.

Proposed solutions

The impediments to the attainment of the qualities and abilities that we believe strong disciplinary and interdisciplinary programming in the three Faculties should aim to cultivate and instill in our students are not insurmountable. The Task Force discussed a number of potential solutions to the issues identified above. The proposed solutions are at the level of programming – developing courses and programs that cross the three Faculties; at the level of institutional structuring – notably in the financial accounting of interdisciplinary courses; and at the level of commitment to the core competencies and interdisciplinarity – on the part of the Provost, Dean(s), professors, and student advisors.

1. Firstly, there needs to be a mechanism to encourage the Faculties to advise or guide students to take courses outside of their home Faculty. This may mean:

   a. Removing the Faculties’ financial ‘penalty’ associated with this activity.

   b. Requiring students to take some courses in Faculties other than their home units to develop breadth and core competencies, e.g. digital or cultural literacy; an understanding of the global and the local.

   c. Lifting, or at the very least re-examining, the prerequisite requirements of many undergraduate courses in each Faculty. Many prerequisites have been introduced as a means of controlling student numbers in courses and not to ensure that students have a particular knowledge or skills base to succeed in the course. The current rigid prerequisite requirements are a serious barrier to interdisciplinary/interfaculty course selections.

2. At the level of undergraduate programming, we are proposing a broad multi-disciplinary first-year experience that crosses the three Faculties. Students would come into an Arts and Science first year, taking courses in each of the three Faculties.
At least some of these courses will have to be designed and taught with the aim of broad multi-disciplinarity in mind, and with an awareness that students enter first year with very different disciplinary backgrounds and abilities. This shared first-year experience is elaborated upon below.

3. In first year of undergraduate studies and beyond there should be a series of interdisciplinary courses that span Faculty interests and do not have specific prerequisites (e.g. Big Questions or thematic courses). These courses would be offered collaboratively among the three Faculties and would build on McMaster’s strong interdisciplinary programs and institutes.

4. Opportunities for interdisciplinary engagement would also be greatly enhanced by allowing students to take ‘Freedom Credit’ courses. This option would allow students to take a specified number of elective courses (outside of their core program) on a pass/fail basis and without an effect on their overall GPA. This would allow students to explore disciplinary areas they are not familiar with without penalty (see Appendix 2). There are a number of Canadian universities that already incorporate ‘Freedom Credits’ in their undergraduate programming (e.g. University of Toronto, McGill, UBC, and York).

5. Undergraduate students would greatly benefit from the introduction of additional ‘interdisciplinary’ programs that bridge all three Faculties and examine relevant and/or current issues of societal importance. These programs would have an interdisciplinary core and would be flexible enough to allow students to explore disciplinary areas of particular interest to them.

6. Another potentially attractive option is to allow students to create, with the assistance and approval of a faculty member or student advisor, a ‘personalized’ interdisciplinary program. With this option, students would identify topical ‘thematic areas’ or ‘threads’ and focus on addressing problems to be solved.

7. In order to allow students to achieve breadth in their programs, we are proposing that departments significantly reduce the number of required discipline-specific undergraduate courses their program students must take for their degrees.

8. At the level of graduate studies, we recommend that departments be offered incentives (monetary or otherwise) to encourage collaboration in student training, course offerings, as well as mounting new interdisciplinary programs including course-based master’s programs.

9. The McMaster website cites interdisciplinarity as a “hallmark of our research centres and institutes … McMaster is home to more than 70 research, centres, and institutes,
most of which are multi- and interdisciplinary in nature and involve faculty and students – both graduate and undergraduate – as they delve deep into research issues across the spectrum.” There needs to be a mechanism to cultivate new opportunities for collaboration among our researchers to live up to this statement. However, due to the highly decentralized nature of research across the university better infrastructure is needed to support interdisciplinary and collaborative research. Financial barriers between Faculties need to be removed to increase the scope for collaborative research.

10. Conscientious governance of the NBM, ensuring that budgeting is guided firmly by broader academic and philosophical goals, and that the budget model does not become ‘the tail wagging the dog’ is key to moving in the right direction. A necessary step may include use of the University Fund for cross-subsidization toward the goal of providing students a holistic, well-rounded education, and other budgetary means by which a Faculty is more amenable to seeing its students take some courses in other Faculties.

We have outlined above some specific scenarios that could help foster the collaborative, student-focused conditions desired among our three Faculties. One exciting possibility discussed at length by the Task Force and captured in item 2 above, namely a first-year program run jointly by the three Faculties, warrants further explanation. While much more work would need to be done on this idea, a common “Arts and Sciences” first year has the potential to create an exceptional first-year experience for students, while at the same time fostering a spirit of collaboration and solidarity among the three Faculties. We can imagine a first-year program that combines a broad introduction to topics of study in the three Faculties, focused especially on instilling core competencies. A student could conceivably come into the University simply as a part of this combined first year, during which they would choose the Faculty in which to specialize over the following three years. This open option would provide a buffering space for students to explore interests and figure out the area in which they would like to major (and/or minor), offering them a carefully-crafted array of courses in helping them toward that end. At the same time, it would not penalize students who are focused from the start; in this case, a student would simply get some needed broad exposure to other disciplines along with the aforementioned focus on core competencies to serve them throughout their time at the University, and before moving into their desired area of specialization in a more dedicated way.

Benefits of this approach would include a valuable opportunity for collaboration among the Faculties and a vision for undergraduate education that is more closely aligned, leading to a heightened sense that the three Faculties are “in something together.” While amalgamation of the three Faculties (see Scenario 2 below) currently presents a dramatic change, something like this common first-year program within the existing structure could provide a lower-stakes test case for possible further movements toward collaboration in the future. An initiative like this could also provide fertile ground for the coordination and combination of efforts among our Faculties in
the areas of student recruitment, promotion, and undergraduate advising in a way that would strengthen each Faculty, and the University. It may, for instance, include dedicating a floor of the new Wilson building to this common first year, with all of the offices just mentioned sharing a common space where students from all three Faculties are encouraged to mingle and find a sense of academic ‘home’. Such a program could add up to a distinctive and innovative first-year student experience that addresses students being ushered too quickly into a narrow educational track at McMaster. It would also serve as a conceptual ‘gateway’ to the three, individual Faculties and perhaps distinguish McMaster from other comparable universities.

Despite the attractiveness of the plan outlined above, there remain obvious challenges that would need to be surmounted. These include the different entrance standards in the three Faculties, the variety of requirements among different programs of study, some being governed by accrediting bodies, and other program differences, such as the level of commitment to the honours (four-year) degree versus the three-year undergraduate degree. To be sure, instituting a plan such as that offered here – or any other plan that calls for significant changes in the relationship among the three Faculties – will entail much further work, a process that may result in yet other exciting possibilities for collaboration.

**Structural considerations**

The vision of a more interdisciplinary collaborative student experience discussed above was strongly advocated by the senior administrators and faculty the Task Force consulted. Agreement on achieving these goals is not enough and will require structural changes. Two scenarios are discussed at some length. The first maintains the three Faculty structure, introduces a Joint Arts and Science Council to facilitate greater cross-Faculty co-operation and encourages the Deans to implement the suggestions listed in previous pages. The second involves a merger of the three Faculties into a single Faculty of Arts and Science. This is the more radical option and it is beyond the mandate of this committee to specify how such a Faculty would be organized or administered. The Task Force viewed the option of merging any two of the three Faculties as the least attractive alternative to the status quo.

The question of which departments are included in which Faculties is, to some extent, a matter of historical accident. For example, History could be viewed as no more at home in Humanities than it would be in Social Sciences; Cognitive Science of Language might be thought to be more naturally at home in the Science Faculty. Similarly, some departments could be organized quite differently in terms of the fields of study that they bring together under the same roof. This subject is evolving and will need to be dealt with regardless of the particular Faculty structure that emerges. It is an issue of relevance to all Faculties at the University and needs to be discussed in a broader mandate than that given to the Task Force.
Scenario 1: Retain the existing three Faculty structure

Given the significant barriers and costs (many of which are not financial) associated with institutional change as significant as the amalgamation of the three Faculties, a prudent approach would be to explore whether the goals and possible solutions outlined above can be achieved within the existing, three-Faculty structure. The main goals would then be to lessen considerably the excessive competition among Faculties (often driven by financial considerations), encourage a turn toward curricular flexibility, re-focus on a set of core competencies to the benefit of students, and generally foster a healthy, positive environment of working together toward common educational goals. In addition, identifying and problem-solving around these positive changes would be an excellent site for collaboration between the three Deans and the Provost. Based on our research, the changes should aim to arrive at a sustainable financial situation for each of the three Faculties, under which each can thrive while retaining the necessary mechanisms for financial accountability.

A motivation for maintaining the three-Faculty structure is the more manageable size of each of these Faculties, keeping intact the ease of collegial interaction thereby enabled and the particular culture and management style developed by each over the years. In contrast, the remoteness that characterizes large amalgamated Faculties is often cited by colleagues as a negative factor of amalgamation. The motivation above, of course, is of itself no reason for projecting immovability as the only future imaginable. The question then is: given the obstacles identified earlier, can the necessary reforms and adjustments take place effectively in the context of the existing structure?

One way of effecting these changes would be to create a Joint Arts and Science Council (JASC) composed of the three Deans plus the Provost. The first items on the agenda of the JASC would be to introduce freedom credits, to oversee the transition to a common first year of study for the three Faculties, and to implement the changes designed to create more course flexibility within all academic programs not constrained by an external certification process. The Provost providing financial incentives to encourage interdisciplinary undergraduate activity could facilitate the work of the JASC. This might include a funding pool that would provide resources to support courses that span more than one Faculty area. Each Faculty could submit proposals to the JASC, which would evaluate their merits and allocate resources from this fund.

Any significant move towards a better-working relationship among the Faculties – be it related to the plan offered here or any other scheme – should have a warming effect that naturally rebounds upon the domains of graduate education and research, in particular cross-Faculty research collaboration. In short, it will help the University create an environment more conducive to research partnerships developing among our three Faculties in a way that is not artificial and enforced from the top, but rather grows up out of common interests and faculty interaction.

Whether or not the move is made to create and empower JASC to deal with the problems and proposed solutions outlined above, it is clear that they do need to be addressed and that some
effective mechanism to address them must be put in place if the three Faculty structure is to remain. Otherwise, existing impediments, fueled by the NBM, will only serve to entrench existing barriers to a healthy environment for students and researchers, most notably the enhanced “silo-ing” we are currently experiencing at McMaster. Failure to adequately address these issues would send a strong signal that the structure is a significant part of the problem and needs to be changed.

Scenario 2: Single amalgamated Faculty of Arts and Science

Another way of achieving these goals is the more radical approach of merging the three Faculties into a single Faculty of Arts and Science\(^3\). What follows is an outline of the possible benefits and risks of an amalgamation of the Faculties of Humanities, Social Sciences and Science.

Benefits

- In an amalgamated Faculty, there will be one Dean who drives the desired changes. Without that single voice (and power), initiatives for change may compete with individual Faculty interests and replicate existing impediments. Instead of three competing Deans, understandably concerned to advance the individual interests of their own Faculties, a Faculty of Arts and Science would have a single administrative team (led by one Dean) with the resources and distributional powers necessary to facilitate and advance the interests of a single body, jointly committed to the educational goals outlined in this Report and with the capacities and powers necessary to drive the various changes we deem necessary for achieving those goals. This view emerged in our discussions with three Senior Administrators who had considerable experience working in combined Arts and Sciences Faculties.

- As would be the case in the previous scenario’s unified first year in Arts and Science, in the area of recruiting, there would no longer be 1) the competition of one Faculty against another; and 2) the confusion for students applying to McMaster over whether they should be in, for instance, a Humanities Faculty or a Social Sciences one. Rather, there would be joint efforts to win the students to McMaster.

- An amalgamated Faculty has the potential to reduce the challenges that exist with current joint programs and the formation of new ones. With barriers taken down between Faculties, students may have better access to courses and programs – and may have greater flexibility in course and program selection.

- An amalgamated Faculty could enhance the possibilities for interdisciplinary teaching. Current arrangements inhibit cross-Faculty teaching at both the undergraduate and

\(^3\)The relationship between the new Faculty of Arts and Science and the existing Arts and Science Program would have to be resolved.
graduate levels, to the detriment of students and instructors alike, and particularly to interdisciplinary programs.

- An amalgamated Faculty could make it easier to develop more effective (and specialized) administrative teams. There could be more consistency in procedures/processes and the quality of administrative support might improve.

- Though feasible within the context of the three-Faculties structure, it may be easier for an amalgamated Faculty to mobilize its legitimate share of Advancement resources in its service by identifying common themes for promotion.

- Having faculty members from a wider range of disciplines meeting together for routine committee work may encourage new collaborations, as they find out what is going on in another discipline. This currently happens not infrequently within individual Faculties as they are now constituted, and could well happen more frequently with even more disciplinary representatives within an amalgamated Faculty. Communication between faculty and staff members in the respective disciplinary areas could be greatly enhanced (through regular meetings, common initiatives etc.).

**The Risks**

As noted earlier, a significant risk of amalgamation is that the benefits of a smaller Faculty structure will be lost: that is, a strong sense of identity, the knowledge of one’s colleagues, access to one’s Dean, the existing morale, based on shared planning and programming (and in some cases, sacrificing). The danger is that the disruption of the change would be detrimental to morale and productivity at all levels. Barriers to a successful amalgamation are a diminished tradition of interdisciplinary education at McMaster and the different financial situation facing the three Faculties at the present time.

- An amalgamated Faculty could create a sense of distance or alienation between faculty members and Administrators, e.g., their Dean. The personal connections faculty members currently have with their Faculty administrators may be diminished or lost in a much larger unit, resulting in less chance for the kind of collegiality essential to the successful functioning of a Faculty. The increased distance and alienation may also extend to inter-Faculty relations.

- There is support for amalgamation in the Faculties of Humanities and Science, particularly at the senior level of administration. However, there is less support for such a move in the Faculty of Social Sciences. Without all three units on board with amalgamation, the dangers inherent in the move are likely to rise to the fore, undermining any hope of achieving the goals identified as essential in this Report.
For amalgamation to be successful the existing three Faculties need to be placed on a similar sustainable financial footing. All three Faculties are dealing with significant debts and a merger would not resolve the ongoing burden of these debts under the NBM. It would only burden the new Faculty with a very large debt. The three Faculties are facing very different issues regarding the allocation of resources under the activity-based NBM, with two Faculties being held harmless. Any merger at this time could result in a mere transfer of resources among the three Faculties to manage existing funding shortfalls. If this were the case, it would create tension among academic units and could poison the environment for interdisciplinary co-operation.

There are many differences among the three Faculties that would have to be attended to in any amalgamation: for, instance, differing entrance requirements, different ways of assessing scholarship and productivity in CP/M and tenure and promotion cases, and so on. If these differences are not dealt with adequately in a move to amalgamation, the aforementioned tensions will almost certainly derail efforts to achieve the proposed solutions outlined above.

Amalgamation, by itself, is no panacea. Without careful planning and execution, it has the potential to replicate, perhaps even exacerbate, all the barriers to success we see in the current Faculty structures at McMaster. Amalgamation cannot be seen as a solution to either the NBM’s shortcomings, or the public’s limited view of the value of a non-STEM university education. In correspondence with other universities using activity-based budgeting and with a combined Faculty, questions are being raised regarding the application of this funding formula within a Faculty that spans units with significantly different funding needs. Therefore, the University must ensure that the NBM is not the driver of academic decisions.

Scenario 3: Merge two of the three Faculties

If one were to consider a merger of two of the three liberal arts Faculties, the combination that comes to mind most readily is the amalgamation of the Faculties of Humanities and Social Sciences into a single Faculty of Arts. This would be a return to the structure that was in place in the late 1960s – some older current faculty will have been hired when Dr. E. Togo Salmon served as Vice-President, Faculty of Arts. The Task Force sensed no enthusiasm for a return to this structure emanating from either of these two Faculties.

Although there are programs such as Psychology that suggest an amalgamation of Science and Social Science would be beneficial, and research such as that conducted in Linguistics and Languages or Multi Media that suggest linking Humanities and Science would work, the Task Force did not consider either of these combinations of Faculties to be viable. Any combination of two Faculties would sacrifice the advantages of the present three Faculties with their established identities and collegial relationships enabled by their relatively small size on the one hand and the
potential advantages of better-coordinated Faculty, financial and administrative support resources of an amalgamated Faculty of Arts and Science on the other.

Conclusion

The Task Force envisages its report as part of the university’s response to the challenge laid down in *FWI: The Next Phase* “to reimagine programs and processes, to reconsider pedagogical techniques, develop interdisciplinary partnerships and collaborations, and further extend McMaster’s connections with the local and global communities that we serve.” It has highlighted solutions and opportunities aimed at enhancing the learning environment for students and removing barriers, both perceived and real, to interdisciplinary and cross-Faculty collaboration in teaching, research and administrative services in the context of the three Faculties of Humanities, Social Sciences and Science.

The Task Force is aware that some of the issues it has identified, for example the crucial importance of ensuring that students graduate with both strong disciplinary knowledge and core competencies, the prioritizing of academically based decision making and university-wide cross-subsidization in the implementation of the NBM, or the strategic valorizing of the liberal arts in a public climate that devalorizes non-professional fields of study, transcend the three Faculties and involve the engagement of the university at large. It is also clear that structural or other changes to current practices may eventually have governance implications that come under Joint Agreements between the University Administration and MUFA.

The Task Force has sought input from key leaders and groups in developing its report (see Appendix 3). We believe that any change, if it is to be embraced, must engage those affected by the changes in debating the issues under consideration. A well-informed move toward any of the solutions proposed above will require further research and thoughtful deliberation, especially through further consultation with the relevant stakeholders across the University. It is in this spirit that we present our report in the hope that it will be subjected to scrutiny and that processes will be put in place for the implementation of those elements of the report that are found to effectively advance the McMaster Principles outlined by President Deane and the strategic goals of McMaster University.
APPENDIX 1

May 11, 2015

Dear Members of the Communities of the Faculties of Humanities, Science, and Social Sciences

Changes in leadership within a particular Faculty often result in some reflection on the road ahead. That reflection understandably focuses on the opportunities and challenges facing that particular Faculty, albeit in the context of the university as a whole, and the community beyond. The Deans of the Faculties of Humanities, Science, and Social Sciences would like to take the opportunity to broaden the discussion, following the change in leadership that has taken place in the first two of those faculties, and the change that will be taking place in the third.

The twenty-first century already has generated a number of opportunities and challenges for the modern research university. New technologies and globalized practices have disrupted the ways in which ideas are created, tested, applied, reformulated and passed on to the next generation. Much research and innovation—and therefore teaching—is being generated through collaboration among faculty members coming from very different disciplinary perspectives. There are exciting new opportunities for growth, and as Deans we want to ensure that our Faculties are best positioned to seize those new opportunities and respond to the changing undergraduate, graduate and research demands of the twenty-first century.

The three Faculties in question share certain characteristics. Most of our undergraduate programs are not subject to accreditation and are not designed to prepare students for a particular professional designation. Instead, we equip our students with a body of knowledge and various capabilities designed to help them better understand and engage with the world around them. We help them develop transferable skills that give them the flexibility to thrive in a competitive job market, or move on to post-graduate or professional education programs. Wherever possible, we interweave the development of skills—whether they be analytical or communication skills—with topics and subjects that they readily embrace. For the most part, we invite our students to explore a range of disciplines and topics in their first year, so that they can find those areas that suit their particular interests and talents. Even as our students identify with particular disciplines in their upper years, our Faculties continue to emphasize the importance of a broad and comprehensive university education.

Our three Faculties contribute to McMaster’s mission by seeking to integrate research and teaching. We want our undergraduate and graduate students to encounter and learn from active researchers and scholars. We seek to expose students to leading edge developments and engage them in inquiry-based approaches to learning. Offering a comprehensive education, therefore, means sustaining a comprehensive research enterprise in our Faculties. We cannot support core areas of McMaster’s teaching without also being strong research units. We know the most valuable experiences for our students involve sharing in discovery with exceptional and active researchers.

In light of these and other common characteristics, the three Deans and the Provost have agreed to strike a small task force to review all three of our Faculties, to ensure that we have the institutional policies, practices and structures that will enable our faculty researchers and undergraduate and graduate students to thrive, and to engage in new and exciting research and educational collaborations.
Specifically, we would like the task force to consider the following challenges:

1. Are we well positioned to ensure that our students (whether undergraduate or graduate) are exposed to excellence in new fields of knowledge in a high quality, personalized, engaging and comprehensive educational experience? Are we providing our students with the best mix of transferable skills?
2. Are we well positioned to cultivate new opportunities for collaboration among our researchers and among our students?
3. Are we well positioned to ensure that our resources are focused most effectively on sustaining our key research and educational goals?
4. Are there barriers – either perceived or real – to the ability of our faculty members to develop or our students to achieve our collective research and educational goals?

Where the task force concludes that we are not well positioned to meet some of our goals, or where there may be barriers to be overcome, we would invite them to consider the following questions:

1. Are there institutional policies or practices, either within or between the Faculties, or at the wider university that could be or need to be changed to achieve the above stated goals?
2. Are there institutional or organizational structures at the university that need to be significantly changed? Specifically, would we be better positioned to achieve our goals by reorganizing two or all three of our Faculties?
3. Are there other ways to support the development of new collaborative programs, courses or research units that transcend disciplines or Faculties?

We do not believe that any of these questions can be considered by one of our Faculties on its own, and that is why we have proposed the creation of a task force with representatives from all three Faculties. We encourage them to consult widely, with faculty, students, and staff, both within and outside the Faculties.

We believe that the recent or imminent changes in leadership in our three Faculties provides a good opportunity for wide ranging review of our institutional practices and structures, with a focus on ensuring that we are well positioned as a university to support the educational and research challenges of the twenty-first century.

Robert Baker  
Dean, Faculty of Science

Kenn Cruikshank  
Dean, Faculty of Humanities

Charlotte Yates  
Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences
The Freedom Credit allows undergraduate students to take an undergraduate elective course on a “Pass/Fail” basis. This model exists in many American and several Canadian universities as a means of promoting exploratory and interdisciplinary learning. Each institution implements this grading option in a manner that suits them; commonalities include:

i. Courses eligible for Freedom Credit are the equivalent of a 3-unit McMaster course;

ii. The Freedom Credit must be outside the student’s core program requirements;

iii. There are a maximum number of courses that may be taken throughout an undergraduate degree; it is often a maximum of four courses with term-based caps (ex. maximum one per term);

iv. Students may need to be in good academic standing (as determined by each institution);

v. Programs, departments, and Faculties are able to implement exceptions to this option;

vi. Students are always informed of the implications of having a course assessed on a pass/fail basis (ex. award/scholarship eligibility; graduate/professional school applications, etc).

Freedom Credit in Canada
Currently, variations of the Freedom Credit can be found at the University of Toronto, the University of British Columbia, York University and McGill University.

- The University of Toronto’s Faculty of Arts and Science have allowed their students to use a pass/fail option since 2008 - when this option started as pilot. Administration of the university have stated that this implementation was met with positive reviews from both faculty and students.

- The University of British Columbia implemented a ‘pass/fail’ option in 2010 following endorsements from both the students’ union and the university’s senate. Implementation was met with wide success.
• In September of 2014, the University of Prince Edward Island publicly announced that they would begin the process of investigating the implementation of “freedom credits” - a term coined during discussion on our [McMaster’s] campus.

All institutions that implement a ‘pass/fail’ grading option state that this option allows students to take an interdisciplinary approach to their education by broadening their course selection. For example:

• The University of Toronto’s registrar website states: “The pass/fail option was created to encourage you to expand your possible course choices to areas where you think you have interest, but may not be confident about how well you will do.”

• The University of British Columbia states: “The Credit/D/Fail (Cr/D/F) grading policy was created to 1) Encourage students’ exploration of subject matter outside their program of study 2) Emphasize learning and academic exploration of the new and unfamiliar 3) Expose students to a broader-based curriculum.”

**Recommendations**

i. Implement a pilot at McMaster to allow undergraduate students to take a Freedom Credit course (a suggested length could be two years, as this was done by the University of British Columbia)

ii. That this pilot start with the Faculties of Humanities, Social Sciences and Science as a means for students within these three Faculties to be exposed to new curriculum that they otherwise may never be exposed to and to better strengthen the interdisciplinary connections between the Arts and Sciences

iii. That a study be conducted during the pilot period to measure the value and experiences of both students and faculty. The resulting findings can be used to inform recommendations for more widespread/ permanent implementation of the Freedom Credit at McMaster; or withdrawal.

- by Brodka & Narro Perez, 2016
APPENDIX 3

In the course of its deliberations the Task Force or a subset of the taskforce consulted the following key leaders or groups on issues related to its mandate:

Charlotte Yates, then outgoing Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences
Roy Cain, then Acting Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences
Jeremiah Hurley, Incoming Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences
Ken Cruikshank, Dean, Faculty of Humanities
Robert Baker, Dean, Faculty of Science
Patrick Deane, President, McMaster University
Douglas Welch, Acting Associate Vice-President and Dean, School of Graduate Studies
Linda Coslovi, Executive Director, Finance and Planning (Academic)
Allison Sekuler, Acting Vice President, Research
Susan Searls Giroux, Associate Vice-President, Faculty
Alan Harrison, Provost, Queen’s University
Dean’s Advisory Council, Faculty of Humanities
Chairs & Directors, Faculty of Social Sciences

Humanities Faculty meeting
Assistant Deans, Faculties of Humanities, Social Sciences and Science
Jacob Brodka, Research Assistant & Rodrigo Narro Perez, former MSU Vice-Presidents
Representatives of OCUFA Committee on Activity Based Budgeting
Members of MUFA Executive Committee

Submissions also received from:
Education Advisory Board
5 Past MUFA Presidents