

FORWARD WITH INTEGRITY: RESEARCH EXCELLENCE

Towards a Brighter World: Taking Stock of McMaster's Research Enterprise

As members of the McMaster community will recall, *Forward with Integrity: The Next Phase*, circulated in 2015, outlined the areas of focus and institutional priorities for McMaster over the next several years.

In that document I emphasized the absolute centrality of research to our institutional mission, and the importance of the University's commitment to high-quality research, ranging from the creation of knowledge through to its application in practice, and spanning all disciplines. I made the point that McMaster's reputation as a highly-respected, research-intensive institution and a pillar of research excellence depends upon us being able to provide effective support to our researchers, increase our research intensity, and promote the importance and relevance of the excellent research being undertaken on our campus.

Where are we Now?

In the three years that have elapsed since the release of *Forward with Integrity: The Next Phase*, a great deal of work has been undertaken to support and promote the research enterprise. The senior administration of the University has committed resources, time and effort to prioritize this issue and an extraordinary amount has been achieved. The appointment of Rob Baker as Vice-President (Research) brought new vision and focus to our research leadership team and the collaborative development and completion of the University's Strategic Plan for Research, *Research for a Brighter World*, earlier this year, is a huge step forward.

Focused on our commitment to research excellence, the five-year strategic plan highlights the diverse strengths of the University's research enterprise, and identifies eight strategic initiatives designed to meet the complex challenges of the future. In addition to a commitment to make strategic investments in support of our researchers, the plan highlights the importance of recruiting, mentoring and supporting diverse and talented teams; developing a pan-university approach to managing and supporting research platforms and equipment; establishing a competitive fund to support major grant applications; enhancing supports for spin-off companies, entrepreneurship and commercialization; and strengthening and increasing collaboration and cooperation across the University and with external partners.

Increased Support for Research

I observed in 2015 that the challenges faced by the research enterprise at McMaster were considerable, and although this remains true, the significant investments to research funding made by the federal government, and the renewed attention to support for research at the

federal level, is extremely welcome. McMaster's senior administration and government relations team continue to work hard on this issue, both directly for McMaster and in partnership with the U15, COU and Universities Canada. The attention being devoted to supporting early-career researchers and the major additional investment to the funding councils provide a positive and substantive signal that this long-standing advocacy has finally found root. The federal government has committed a total of \$3.8 billion over five years, which includes substantial increases for the major federal research granting councils and investments in the infrastructure needed to support high-quality research, as well as the establishment of a tri-agency fund to support research that is international, interdisciplinary, fast-breaking and higher-risk. McMaster is deeply engaged in the ongoing process of consultation and advocacy regarding this fund, and we look forward to the significant opportunities that will arise from it.

Internally, too, we have made adjustments to ensure a greater flow of funds into the research enterprise, and into the hands of the Deans to allocate to priority areas within their respective Faculties. A number of the changes to the budget model made in 2016 were specifically targeted to provide enhanced support for research. In addition to the adjustments made to the University's Research Infrastructure Fund, which provides the Deans with resources to support research activities in their Faculties, the pool of discretionary funds available to the Vice-President (Research) was increased to ensure that funding is available to support initiatives at an institutional level. This followed the allocation by the Provost of \$2.5 million from the University Fund to the Research Excellence Fund to provide additional funding directly to the Faculties, and changes in the allocation of funds to address shortfalls arising from the CIHR program transition.

Promoting McMaster's Research Excellence to a Global Audience

In discussions with the Deans and others about McMaster's research enterprise a persistent concern emerged that the outstanding work undertaken on our campus was not promoted widely enough locally, nationally or globally. The "*Big Ideas, Better Cities*" Research Showcase, which took place in 2015/16, sought to begin to address this by showcasing the University's cutting-edge research and highlighting the many ways that McMaster research can help respond to societal and global challenges, and support the creation of healthy, smart, creative cities. The initiative involved more than sixty researchers from all six Faculties, and featured four clusters of high-profile public events which drew attention to the excellence and relevance of the research being conducted on our campus, promoted our researchers to a broad audience, and provided an opportunity to celebrate the quality and variety of the work undertaken in our institution on a daily basis. The total attendance at events was 2800, the Climate Change and Environment showcase alone generated a social media reach of 380,118, and the combination of earned and paid media and op-eds helped to raise the profile of individual researchers, as well as the University as a whole.

The Research Showcase was followed by the institution-wide brand marketing initiative intended to build upon McMaster's national and international reputation as a highly recognized research-intensive university, promote the University's impact and success as a research-focused student-centred institution, and enhance the engagement of faculty, students, staff, alumni and other key stakeholders. Extensive consultations across the McMaster community resulted in the adoption of the "advancing human and societal health and well-being"

positioning statement, and subsequently the launch of the *Brighter World* brand platform in May 2017.

Brighter World is intended to communicate our optimism and ability to advance human and societal health and well-being, reflect the positive impact that McMaster's researchers, students and alumni continue to have on the world, and position McMaster to a global audience as an outstanding institution for research, learning and teaching. Traditionally, McMaster has relied on earned media, but since the launch of *Brighter World* the University has invested in extensive targeted print, video, digital and social media advertising, which has helped to establish McMaster's new branding with a global audience of academics and researchers. Much attention has also been paid to the ongoing revitalization of McMaster's website and digital presence. The Brighter World Research Content Hub (BrighterWorld.ca) brings together McMaster's many research strengths in an accessible public showcase and the website metrics for the Daily News and Brighter World Research Content Hub reveal a 72% year-over-year increase in all users, 90% year-over-year increase in new users and a 31% year-over-year increase in total sessions. Importantly, almost all of the increase in website traffic is being generated by users outside Canada – a further signal that McMaster is attracting the notice of a global research audience.

Improving our Standing in the World University Rankings

The other key element of our branding and marketing work has been to analyze and work to improve the University's performance within the most important international rankings. The University's Rankings Analysis Advisory Group, established in 2015, has done remarkable work in this regard. In 2017 McMaster was one of only two U15 universities to improve our overall position in all three of the major rankings and we are currently ranked 77th in the world by the Times Higher Education's World University Rankings, standing as the fourth highest ranked university in Canada and the second highest ranked university in Ontario. In the recently released Maclean's annual rankings of Canadian universities, McMaster jumped two places to fourth place, and was ranked in first place for citations, and in second place for the average sponsored research income per faculty member.

McMaster has also now been ranked by Research Infosource as Canada's most research-intensive university for two years in a row (2017 and 2018), and is currently placed first for the research-intensity both of our faculty members and our graduate students. Our annual research income of \$379.9M equates to \$434,700 per faculty member, which is more than double the national average, and \$82,800 per graduate student, and has moved McMaster up to 7th place in Canada for total research income. As a result of this success, the University placed second in Research University of the Year 2018 in the medical-doctoral category.

Securing Targeted Resources: The Brighter World Research Initiative

With the new Strategic Plan for Research in place and the *Brighter World* brand well-established and operating to raise the visibility of our researchers and our University, the next phase is the *Brighter World Research Initiative (BWRI)*. This is a deliberate strategy to increase research revenue flowing into the University from all sources. The strategic areas of research focus and the priorities for funding will be determined in accordance with the Strategic Plan for

Research and led by the office of the Vice-President (Research) but the intention is to ensure that the benefits of this work are felt across the campus and provide support for researchers in all six Faculties. Moving beyond traditional fundraising avenues and recognizing the increasing appetite and need for inter-disciplinary and multi-institutional partnerships to find solutions to our most pressing problems, BWRI will focus on securing additional research revenue from a variety of sources. McMaster has already been successful in securing funding in partnership with other institutions: the Advanced Manufacturing Consortium established in partnership with the University of Waterloo and Western University received \$35M in funding over five years from the provincial government, and the Next Generation Advanced Manufacturing Supercluster, currently housed at McMaster Innovation Park and in which McMaster plays a key role, was one of the successful bids for the federal government's recent \$950M supercluster initiative.

Given the likelihood that the focus on large partnership-based initiatives will increase, the need to develop opportunities and support for inter-disciplinary collaboration becomes ever more important, as does the need to look beyond traditional funding sources and pursue both philanthropic and non-philanthropic funding options in support of our research. The *Brighter World Research Initiative* is being conceived on a scale and to a model that seeks to capture and capitalize on a broad range of opportunities and leverage McMaster's strengths and partnerships. The next step is to work with the Deans to identify the key themes, projects and proposals that will form the basis of the initiative. These themes will be drawn from the Strategic Plan for Research and be consistent with our institutional positioning statement, "advancing human and societal health and well-being". We will then be in a position to finalize the overall case for support, develop project proposals and funding strategies and ultimately identify an ambitious financial goal for the initiative.

Undaunted Ambition

Throughout its history McMaster has been known for its ambition and innovation and I see no diminishment of this sense of ambition in our researchers, our Deans, or our senior team. The landscape for research is changing but McMaster is well-positioned to adapt to this and respond to all the challenges we face. I look forward to formally launching the *Brighter World Research Initiative* and to working in partnership with colleagues across the institution and beyond to promote and advance our research enterprise and ensure that our talented researchers receive the resources and support they need.



Patrick Deane
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