



President and
Vice-Chancellor

Gilmour Hall, Room 238
1280 Main Street West
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
L8S 4L8

Phone: 905.525.9140, Ext. 24340
Fax: 905.522.3391
E-mail: presdnt@mcmaster.ca
<http://www.mcmaster.ca>

FORWARD WITH INTEGRITY: A LETTER TO THE McMASTER COMMUNITY

Dear Members of the McMaster University Community,

On Faculty Day during Welcome Week I was pleased to participate for the second time in a wonderful McMaster ritual, standing with the Provost and the Dean of Students to shake the hands of incoming students as they passed through Edwards Arch in symbolic entry to our university community. Despite the fact that all wore the trappings of their group identity and faculty affiliations, each handshake brought home the uniqueness of the student; one was reminded that while we talk about “the student body” and “the university” as if these were two monoliths, the proper relationship between any student and those entrusted with the support and development of that student can never be impersonal.

The institutionalization of education brings benefits, undoubtedly, but it also brings risks: entrenched dogma may prevail over liberation of the mind, and the imposition of uniform standards may erode recognition of and respect for individual perspectives. In shaking the hand of each student we indicate that it is our intention their ideas will be treated respectfully and their academic career supported with all appropriate attention paid to their unique circumstances. In doing so we reaffirm that civility is expected to govern the life of the University as a whole, that all of us—not only the students, but also the members of staff who support their learning and their campus lives, the faculty who direct their learning and advance the state of knowledge, the broader community in which students are privileged to learn, and the government which provides material support—are bound together in a relationship that demands mutual respect and co-operation.

Over the past year I have been the beneficiary of your great civility, and I have worked hard to learn about and understand McMaster University, its history, values, and culture. At the several open forums I organized you were generous with your knowledge and your wisdom, and in many other venues throughout the year I had opportunities to learn and to reflect on our university, imagining an outstanding future which will be continuous with our distinguished past. The purpose of this letter is to give you my thoughts on the principles that should guide us in planning for that future, and the priorities that I believe will be critical if we are to achieve our goals.

Things Constant

Directions (1995) and *Refining Directions* (2003, reaffirmed 2008) together comprise the blueprint that has guided McMaster University in its development over the last fifteen years.

The broad goals of the University, as laid out in *Refining Directions*, are admirable and challenging, continuous with our past, and must continue to be regarded as fundamental to our mission in the future. Thus we will provide an innovative and stimulating learning environment where students can prepare themselves to excel in life, we will achieve increasingly high levels in research results and reputation by building on existing and emerging areas of excellence, and—a prerequisite for success in the preceding—we will continue to build an inclusive community with a shared purpose.

That purpose needs to be stated directly. It is the exercise and development of the intellect at the highest possible level, and in an appropriately broad range of applications: theoretical, creative, practical, and professional. In that sense, our purpose as a community of diverse constituencies is qualitatively singular while being numerous in its manifestations. Our purpose and the forms in which it has expressed itself have thus remained relatively unchanged from the time of the establishment of McMaster University in 1887.

Also consistent since that time has been a commitment to service and to the public good, an all-embracing assumption in the life of the University that began with the gift of Senator William McMaster, and was given added emphasis in 1957 when the University ceased to be a trust of the Baptist Convention and became a private non-denominational institution pursuant to legislation in the Province of Ontario. In 1955 President Gilmour had noted that notwithstanding the intervening role of the church at that stage, “our educational responsibility” was owed ultimately to the Province¹, which implied that parochial governance could continue only so long as it was capable of providing adequate support to the University in its discharge of that broader public responsibility. The purpose of the institution from its inception has thus been through education and research to develop and realize the potential both of individuals and of society at large.

Things Changing

2011 is not 1887, nor is it 1955. The circumstances within which McMaster University has worked to realize its purpose have changed dramatically and constantly over the years, and can be expected to continue to do so in the future. When Alexander Charles McKay became Chancellor of McMaster in 1905, enrolment was approximately 170 students. By the 1940s it had reached 1000. Since 2003 undergraduate enrolment has increased by 27%, and graduate by 45.2%, with the total standing today at well in excess of 26,000. Growth in student numbers, coupled with disproportionately low increases in government funding per BIU² has resulted in a decline in real funding of as much as 27% since 1980³. During the same period sponsored

¹ Charles M. Johnston, *McMaster University: II/ The Early Years in Hamilton, 1930-1957* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 243.

² Basic Income Unit: A weighted student enrolment measure intended to register differences between programs and between levels within programs, for the purpose of determining appropriate funding.

³ Snowdon & Associates, *Revisiting Ontario College and University Revenue Data* (Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2009).

research at McMaster has soared, increasing by nearly 340% in the last decade alone, earning us the title of Top Performer in Research Income Growth, 2010.⁴ We have achieved significant profile as a research-intensive university of international standing. Yet neither this rise in reputation, nor funding nor enrolment—nor the changing societal and economic expectations that underpin enrolment growth—may ultimately prove to have been the most significant element in our changing landscape.

More important perhaps will be the digital revolution, which has transformed access to knowledge, created new forms and forums for learning through interaction, and even effected changes in our thought patterns and processes. Far-reaching questions now demand to be answered: How should we conceive of learning institutions in a digital age?⁵ And how should McMaster reconfigure itself in that context, yet still remain true to its identity, history, and enduring values?

Keeping it Together, Looking to the Future

At McMaster we need to look with equal clarity and determination at both our enduring values and our changed and changing context. Not only must we reaffirm our commitment to the vision laid out in *Refining Directions*, to the shared purpose of our academic community, but we must also uphold above all else the obligation of the University to serve the greater good, beginning with our immediate community, our city, and extending outwards to the world at large. We enjoy and exercise an authority that is conferred on the university by society, so it is through service to the highest ideals of that society that our work will have integrity.

At the same time it will be essential for us to call up—and if necessary reanimate—our longstanding institutional predisposition to think creatively, originally and innovatively about the work we do and the challenges we must address. Ongoing and significant changes in the policy, fiscal and socio-cultural contexts for higher education in Ontario will place a premium on creativity and adaptability—to say nothing of the demands wrought by rapid and profound technological change with its concomitant effects on human behaviour. In order to unleash that creativity we must reassert the radically interrogative spirit that is a cornerstone of the academy. Thus integrity, in the sense of truth to purpose, requires us to look deeply into all questions—into the epistemological transformation opened up by digital technology, or into the practical challenges posed to our institution by altered material circumstances—and to insist that nothing will be taken for granted. “Most of our assumptions,” famously wrote Marshall McLuhan, “have outlived their usefulness.”

One of the most significant effects of the digital revolution has been to facilitate—and by facilitating to increase the influence of—the network as a model for human interaction. And even if we cannot go along with those today who would redefine institutions like our own as

⁴ Research Infosource, 2010: <http://www.researchinfosource.com/top50.shtml>

⁵ For an interesting discussion of this issue, see Cathy N. Davidson and David Theo Goldberg, *The Future of Thinking: Learning Institutions in a Digital Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2010).

“mobilizing networks,”⁶ it is obvious that to succeed in circumstances such as presently exist, universities will need to maximize their internal coherence; they will need to ensure not only that their different constituencies are appropriately aligned, but also that the relationship of one part to the other is interactive, that internal boundaries are porous and a site for cooperation rather than separation. Moreover, and in a manner that leaves their autonomy uncompromised, universities will need to foster porousness on the border between themselves and the world that they exist to serve. Where the university reaches out into its surrounding community, integrity as an organizational characteristic, resulting from an effective and dynamic network of internal relationships, turns into integrity as an ethical position.

Principles

Integrity is a virtue that can be identified in complex structures of many kinds—from buildings to the human personality—where it signals the absence of segregation, discontinuity, or internal dissociation. McMaster’s future success will depend on the cultivation and celebration of integrity, in all the senses invoked here, and as embodied in the following principles that must guide us in our efforts to realize the goals of the University in the coming decade:

1. *We are an institution devoted to the cultivation of human potential, which we believe cannot be realized by individuals in isolation from one another, from their history or their imagined future, from the society which surrounds them, or from the physical universe which sustains them. Our programs and activities will reflect this comprehensive view.*
2. *It follows that in defining our strengths and seeking to build on them, we will adopt a multidisciplinary perspective, recognizing that even the most specialized problem requires an appropriately broad-based approach.*
3. *Our future shall be continuous and consistent with our past, expanding upon and fulfilling the historic character of McMaster as an institution. We will foster the distinct identity of this university, while at the same time continuing to recognize the importance of collaboration and dialogue with sister institutions in Ontario, Canada, and abroad.*
4. *Notwithstanding that commitment to continuity with the past and to coordination with practices elsewhere, we will place the highest value on original thought and on innovation.*
5. *To that end, we will not only reaffirm the importance of radical questioning at the heart of the academic enterprise, but we will ensure the integrity of our work by bringing a critical view to all of our practices—those which bear directly upon education and research as well as those less directly related to it.*

⁶ Davidson and Goldberg, 129.

6. *Wherever possible, we will reduce or eliminate obstacles to cooperation.*
7. *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.*

Priorities

The foregoing principles, extrapolated from recent University communications as well as from discussions held during the 2010-2011 academic year, do not of course represent the sum of our aspirations, nor do they fully account for the breadth of activity that occurs at McMaster every day. They are, however, the salient points of a view of higher education that is consistent with our past and (perhaps more important) the most promising with which we can confront our future. That view, uncompromising in its sense of standards to be pursued, and radically open to new ways of thinking in order to achieve those standards, will need to be courageously espoused. McMaster's reputation for innovation and creative thought—for approaching pedagogical issues in the same spirit of skepticism as we approach inherited wisdom in the sciences, humanities and social sciences—will be our main defence against obsolescence and irrelevance in rapidly changing circumstances.⁷ Indeed, if we live up to our reputation in this regard, we will provide a model for universities at large and vindication for their longevity as institutions.

In this process, which will effectively realign the University with its evolving context and facilitate our going from strength to strength in the next decade, we will focus on three priorities: developing a distinct, effective and sustainable undergraduate experience, enhancing the way we see and build connections between McMaster and the community, and supporting continuing excellence in research that informs and integrates with a reconceived educational mission. The principles articulated above will require us to address these three priorities as interconnected and mutually reinforcing areas of activity. They will furthermore also demand that we approach internationalization—a notion that has taken on a self-justifying life of its own in universities across the globe⁸—not as a separate project, but as one aspect of those integrated three priorities.

⁷ The 2010 Report of The President's Advisory Committee on the Impact of the Current Economic Situation (PAC-ICES) recommended that the University "undertake a formal re-examination of its mission, strategy and objectives. This should include a thorough identification and evaluation of alternative approaches available to the University to achieve its chosen objectives, all within the context of the resources that are expected to be available. This will ensure that it is responsive to forces that influence its relevance and fortunes." See http://www.mcmaster.ca/opr/html/discover_mcmaster/presidents_message/pac-ices.html

⁸ *Internationalization of Higher Education: Global Trends, Regional Perspectives* is the 3rd Global Survey Report of the International Association of Universities, September 2010. Of 745 institutions surveyed worldwide, 87% specify that internationalization is either part of their mission or of strategic importance (21).

The Student Experience

Few institutions of our age and with our strong traditions can also boast, let alone demonstrate, a significant capacity to reinvent themselves. Yet the history of McMaster is one of invention and reinvention. The Arts and Science Program, thirty years old in 2011, was a determined attempt to escape the constraints of a discipline- or department-centred curriculum and to create a program that would effectively answer by example the concern that undergraduate education cannot thrive in a research-intensive university. It was a bold creation, the way for which had been opened up by two other extraordinary McMaster innovations a decade earlier: the Medical program with its premium on self-directed and problem-based learning, and the Engineering and Management Program.⁹ All of the diverse health professional programs, as well as the Bachelor of Health Sciences program, founded a decade ago, have extended this tradition—one to which the Integrated Science Program is the most recent addition.

These successes have each been the result not of a concerted attempt to reform all of undergraduate education across the university,¹⁰ but of the determination to create an extremely high-quality learning experience for a limited student constituency within a relatively circumscribed (if always interdisciplinary) field. In each case, the experience has been crafted with the program's particular learning outcomes in mind, so students have benefited from self-directed, inquiry- or problem-based approaches, as well as from a significant experiential or service-learning component.

Taken together, these programs admirably indicate what forms of undergraduate education are desirable, available and effective in a research-intensive university. Furthermore, their success as a group must draw attention to the questionable viability of other modes of learning in this setting, particularly of any approach defined by the following: narrow disciplinarity, discontinuity between inquiry-driven research and passive undergraduate learning practice, insistence on the classroom or library as the exclusive place of learning, and on essays, tests and similar instruments as the only basis for evaluation.

At McMaster we have two compelling reasons for building generally on the successes of our best programs: first, those programs have provided excellent examples of how to develop undergraduate education in a research-intensive setting; and second, material circumstances will make it increasingly difficult to offer a high-quality educational experience *unless* we abandon the constraints of inherited practices and preconceptions about the way students learn and the ways in which we can assist their learning. A point made by many at a recent retreat for McMaster President's Teaching Award winners is that while we delight in the success of our flagship programs, our goal must be to make that kind of high quality learning experience the norm across the University.

For these reasons we must initiate a strategic and thoughtful institution-wide reconsideration of teaching practice and learning assumptions, from curriculum to delivery to program and

⁹ See Leslie J. King, "Quest for Meaning in Undergraduate Education," in *Combining Two Cultures: McMaster University's Arts and Science Programme: A Case Study*, eds. Herb Jenkins, Barbara Ferrier and Michael Ross (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2004), 3.

¹⁰ See Jenkins et al., vii.

even degree rules. Not even our most established and celebrated programs should be exempt from this process; after all, the most venerable is often the most in need of rejuvenation. In keeping with our principles, as well as the prevailing consensus on what makes for an enriching and transformative learning experience, programs new and old should integrate three elements, naturally having due regard for what might be appropriate in their field and for ways creatively to address material circumstances:

1. *Experiential learning*

The 2010 National Survey of Student Engagement¹¹ indicates that more than 80% of first-year students in participating research-intensive universities will undertake or have completed practicum, internship, field experience, co-op experience, or clinical assignment and will do or have done community service or volunteer work. Among senior students the response is very similar, with more than 70% of senior students in the top 10% of NSSE institutions completing such assignments. These figures map very closely onto aggregated figures for the top 10% of all 2010 NSSE institutions on that “Benchmark of Effective Educational Practice.” At McMaster, the evidence is that in the category of “Enriching Educational Experiences,” which includes experiential activities, we fare a little better than our sister institutions in Ontario, but not as well as comparable U.S. Peers. In fact, the most recent survey shows that on this benchmark, the gap between McMaster and the top 50% and top 10% of NSSE institutions is significant.

As a category, experiential learning includes both those activities for which academic credit is or has been given (co-op, service learning etc.), and volunteer work. We need to scrutinize this distinction and to think carefully about conditions under which the latter might be considered for credit. Furthermore, the practice of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) is now well established in the academic community, although not widely in Ontario, and we need to consider the role that a student’s prior experience should play in our assessment of her or his academic accomplishment.

Experiential components deliver obvious benefits in terms of the quality of the learning experience and the level of engagement felt by students. If well-conceived and effectively, ethically managed, they also bring tangible social and economic benefit to the community outside of our campus. And last, they can relieve pressure on space and other resources on the campus itself, enabling us to be more flexible and creative with the resources we have. Experiential learning will thus be key both to the future quality and to the sustainability of our programs.

2. *Self-Directed Learning*

A key element in many McMaster innovations, self-directed learning can be expected to grow in importance in the future, as students’ access to information and to the tools of discovery increases under the influence of cultural and technological change. Both experiential and group-based learning presuppose some capacity in the student for self-direction, and indeed even more historically persistent forms of instruction, such as the

¹¹ *Major Differences: Examining Student Engagement by Field of Study*. Annual Results 2010.

lecture, must change in response to the altered place—the growing independence—of the student in the ecology of knowledge creation and transmission. When self-directed learners engage with the broader community, that ecology is further altered by the presence of many more and diverse teachers than the university can generally provide.

3. *Interdisciplinarity*

Also a vital and historical part of the McMaster academic identity, interdisciplinarity is acquiring greater importance and altered meaning in the post-digital age. Where once it signified work on the boundary between one relatively fixed discipline and another, the erosion of disciplinarity itself and the advent of a radically different model—which conceives of subject areas as merely saliences in a fluid but integrated network of intellectual inquiry—means that a comprehensive approach to any problem must be, by definition, multidisciplinary. This point has far-reaching implications for all areas of academic activity. If properly understood and assimilated it will compel significant change to education at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, and it will license and support bold, paradigm-breaking new directions in research.

Community Engagement

Experiential, service-, cooperative and problem-based learning, community-based and undergraduate research: these are all manifestations of an academic commitment to relevance, of a “genuine and long-overdue return to the civic mission of higher education.”¹² They are the pedagogical tools of an academic culture of service, such as has been the distinguishing mark of McMaster University since its founding. Community engagement is a key part of our history, certainly, but as is the case at most universities, its role in our teaching and learning practice is at times far from clear. Notwithstanding the innovations for which this university is famous, and the elite, community-engaged programs which have been built around them, we are to some extent still caught up in a curricular drift typical of North American universities in the period since World War II—one that does not necessarily support the assertion that engagement or service is at the heart of what we do. A recent commentator has gone so far as to suggest that community engagement is fundamentally at odds with the nature of the university and that “saving the world” is something that faculty and students must do “on their own time.”¹³ McMaster has demonstrated throughout its history that outstanding academic work can be an extraordinary force for the good of human beings, society, and nature; so our task in the future must be to consolidate and deepen that contribution. And rather than relegate community engagement to the status of a “free-floating add-on,”¹⁴ something we do on our own time, we need to integrate it fully and meaningfully into the work of the academy—into our normal activities of exploration, questioning and synthesizing, and subject to the most rigorous academic values.

¹² For background to this, see Dan W. Butin, *Service Learning in Theory and Practice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 125.

¹³ Stanley Fish, *Save the World on Your Own Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹⁴ Butin, 140.

Research

In no aspect of our work has McMaster's commitment to service and the public good been more extensive and obvious than in research. Curiosity-driven or applied, the contribution of our researchers to the physical, cultural and economic wellbeing of the human community has been disproportionate for our size and location as an institution. In committing ourselves to a heightened level of community engagement we therefore commit ourselves unequivocally in the future to even greater achievements in research, which will be supported and advanced by adherence to the principles and priorities laid out in this document. There must be integrity in the relationship between our reconceived educational mission and the research enterprise, not only in alignment and orientation towards the public good, but in terms of academic values and scholarly practice as well. At the undergraduate level, problem-based and self-directed learning foster a capacity for research that can only strengthen and support the university's overall commitment to discovery. In the same way that experiential learning must take many different forms depending upon the academic area, self-directed learning and research among undergraduates cannot always replicate what occurs at the most advanced levels. The principle will be consistent, however: assuming command of and respect for the achievements of the past, we will place the highest value on original thought and on innovation. Similarly, we will encourage and support multidisciplinary approaches to research subjects. So long as the undergraduate learning experience is conceived as has been suggested here, we will as an institution escape the not uncommon yet destructive tendency to see and experience excellence in research and in undergraduate education as antithetical aims.

If there is an appropriate measure of continuity between the modes of research and the forms of undergraduate learning, how much better will be the experience of our graduate students, whose combined activities as student, teacher and researcher give them a vitally important role at the heart of the academic mission. Growth in graduate enrolment in recent years has supported, and in turn been nourished by, a parallel intensification and expansion of research activity. Since we intend to see research continue on that same trajectory in the future, opportunities for the development of graduate education at McMaster will continue to present themselves. This is not to say that it is only in research-based graduate programs that we should expect positive developments. In professional, course-based Masters programs, for example, we will find and provide for students new opportunities to make a more direct intervention in the wellbeing of our society, whether in health, culture, business, or any other area for which we have expertise. We must continue to equip graduate students in all programs with the practical skills and experiential knowledge that will help them translate their academic achievements into success after graduation. Recent efforts in this direction, like those intended to help graduate students increase their skills and effectiveness as teachers, indicate our commitment to enhancing the quality and richness of graduate student life.

We reassert therefore our intention to be a student-centred research-intensive university, but recognize that to be successful in this regard we will need to effect significant changes in the nature of the student experience across the campus. Indeed, we will need to understand that just as our research activities reach always beyond the institution, learning at all levels may be more effective when not confined to campus and when not limited by unscrutinized assumptions about format, evaluation, and ways of learning.

Alignment—of academic activities, resources, goals and premises—is obviously critical if we are to maintain or increase our present level of research excellence. In the absence of significantly increased material investment, in fact, better alignment represents our greatest promise of increased success. It will be necessary to allocate funds to increase our research capacity and to ensure that our future achievements either match or surpass those of the present. We will establish a Science and Engineering Research Board in parallel to our existing Arts Research Board, to provide support to new junior faculty members. Recognizing as we must that areas of particular research strength will emerge, will need to be acknowledged, and will attract to themselves especially high levels of external and internal funding support, it is also critical to maintain a healthy breadth of high-quality research across those fields that are central to the teaching mission of the University. To do otherwise would be to enshrine implicitly a division between teaching and research that runs counter to the principle of institutional integrity.

Internationalization

On this subject, perhaps more than any other, integrity matters. That international activities and an international perspective should have a coherent and integrated role in the prosecution of our academic mission is obviously an issue of fundamental importance; indeed, as I have already indicated in my comments on research, there are certain aspects of that mission that have always been international in their day-to-day reality and in the scope of their goals. Internationalization of the universities and colleges of Ontario has in the last year become a stated aim of government, and we welcome this policy direction; after all, it will reinforce positively much that we already do. It is important, however, to note that in this respect Ontario is a relative latecomer. For at least a decade aggressive internationalization has been the preoccupation and competitive focus of universities in a number of countries; and behind that focus stand two motives that need to be unpacked in order for us better to chart our course forward.

On the one hand, there is the legitimate acknowledgement that technology and global economics have shrunk the world, and that the context for learning and research cannot ever again be parochial. The “civic mission” of higher education must thus be discharged on the world stage, and that means that graduates must be equipped to be proper “global citizens,” with an understanding of global issues and a facility for translating insights or mobilizing discoveries across cultural borders. On the other hand, a very significant motive has been simply financial. As universities have struggled to reconcile rising costs, local operating constraints, and static or declining enrolments, they have looked to emerging economies like China, India and Brazil to provide a stream of high-fee-paying international students to underwrite their future prosperity, or perhaps merely their survival.

In itself, the pursuit of a new market to support the ongoing business of the academy does not necessarily raise questions of integrity—either in the normal way we use that word, or in the specialized sense invoked in this document. But where universities fail to provide the additional resources necessary to support a growing international student presence on their campuses, or where the presence of such students is not matched by a substantive global reorientation at the curricular level, or where international recruiting proceeds

opportunistically along a course separate from strategic academic priority setting; then in all meanings of the word there is a failure of integrity.

Whether most attempts at internationalization elsewhere in the world have yielded the hoped-for financial rewards is a real question. Where universities have attempted to address their structural deficits by aggressive international recruiting with minimal additional outlay, the leveling-off or decline of demand has brought budget catastrophe. What is certain is that if there was once a window that allowed for exploitation of the international student market, that window is now closed. International students enjoy increased options at home and abroad, so while the market of students is still considerable and eager, it is not indiscriminating. Furthermore, countries that value an education abroad are increasingly willing to fund their citizens to pursue one; but they will insist that their money is well spent, and that the fiscal as well as intellectual benefits of academic exchange flow in both directions.

Internationalization in the university cannot be one-sided. If its essence is merely the recruiting of foreign students to pay fees to a western institution so that they can become westernized through a curriculum that registers neither their presence nor the impact upon the host of their nation and culture, the lexicon of colonialism could provide us with a better term. Internationalization *of* the university by the presence of foreign students, by faculty involvement in a network of research alliances abroad, by faculty and student travel for research and development purposes, and above all by the adoption of an internationalized perspective in curriculum and program design on our campus: this is not only desirable and appropriate to present circumstances, it is urgently needed.

We need to embrace internationalization of this sort, recognizing that travel abroad for our faculty and students and travel here by students from other parts of the world is important but not the heart of the internationalization of McMaster. The heart of that process—and it is far from the easiest—is the transformation of the university *on its own ground*, whereby our academic orientation and breadth of knowledge embraces the globe, our approach to any problem is informed by a global awareness. We do not need a campus overseas and we should not equate “international academic experience” with travel beyond our borders, or we may miss the point of internationalization in the academy. Poverty is a global problem, and its root causes and possible cures can certainly be studied in many places from Mumbai to East Africa; but they can also be studied with equal effect here in Hamilton. It would be absurd for universities to embrace the imperative of international travel for students while failing to regard education in and understanding of Canadian aboriginal issues as an equally pressing concern for anyone seeking global citizenship.

If experiential learning must not be thought of as simply an add-on to the student experience, the same is true of international education. Both require us to radically re-think everything that makes up a course of study, the ways in which we should seek to evaluate students’ performance, and what should be the shape and content of the curriculum. Interestingly, both have an ethical dimension which requires attention: just as in service learning the student’s relation to the community must be mutually beneficial, in the internationalization of the academy it is not enough for the world to serve as a subject for study and a source of students—the university must become different in the process of internationalizing itself.

In 1996, McMaster University was chosen to host to the United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health (UNU-INWEH). Then in 2009, the University became a signatory to United Nations Academic Impact (UNAI), an alliance of universities and similar institutions across the world devoted to advancing the mandate and values of the United Nations through education and research. There are ten basic principles to which signatories of UNAI must subscribe,¹⁵ including a commitment to “human rights, among them freedom of enquiry, opinion, and speech,” and to use education to advance peace and conflict resolution, address poverty, and promote sustainability, inter-cultural dialogue and understanding and the “unlearning” of intolerance. In addition, UNAI universities commit themselves to “educational opportunity for all people regardless of gender, race, religion or ethnicity,” and to “the opportunity for every interested individual to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary for the pursuit of higher education.” All of these principles converge in two: first, a commitment to building capacity in higher education systems across the world,” and second, “a commitment to encouraging global citizenship through education.”

If we seek to foster “global citizenship,” then, it is not enough to nurture an international sensibility in our students or merely to insist that before graduating they go on some sort of exchange. Still less sufficient is it to say that as an institution we have become a global force by virtue of our many cross-border alliances in the field of research. Global citizenship is not a passive awareness but an active orientation to the challenges of the world.¹⁶

The Integrity of the Whole: Looking Forward

The internationalization of McMaster needs to be understood not as an end in itself, but as merely one inextricable part of a mission that seeks simultaneously to connect with and improve the community, local and global, to provide a distinct, effective and sustainable education, and to integrate that reconceived educational project with the highest possible achievements in research. International engagement is no cause for pride—nor is it likely to fulfill its potential—if it implies disengagement from local organizations and issues. Similarly, an education at the undergraduate or graduate level becomes “global” not by embracing academic tourism but paradoxically by dissolving borders. And while international collaboration is one measure of strength in research, the more telling indicator is global impact.

To strengthen and enhance our place among the world’s top universities I believe we need to press forward vigorously to reconceive and then reassert the integrity for which McMaster has traditionally been known and in which consists its distinct identity. We have not embraced a questionable and opportunistic model of internationalization; over our history we have creatively sought and found excellent and appropriate forms for undergraduate education in a research-intensive context; and our research achievements have earned us a legitimate and enviable place on the world stage. Thanks to the vicissitudes of funding, to the changing needs and aspirations of the society we serve, and to normal shifts in public values and priorities, we have been challenged in staying true to our history and mission. I believe we have managed to

¹⁵ See <http://academicimpact.org/engpage.php?engprinciples>

¹⁶ UNAI identifies these in the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations, but the list is obviously much longer than that. See <http://academicimpact.org/engpage.php?goals>

do so because of the outstanding dedication and work of our faculty and staff, our determination to keep on hiring the very best scholars and teachers—in short because of our resolve and commitment as an institution—and also partly because that mission itself has a timeless integrity.

Timeless does not mean unchanging, however, and it is clear that in order for McMaster to preserve and advance its standing amongst the great universities, we will need to reassess and reinvent much of what we do, having appropriate regard for changed circumstances and for the reality that change is ongoing. During the last twelve months a serious public discussion has arisen around the issue of differentiation in the university sector. It is clear that in the coming year we will be called upon to identify our unique identity, and perhaps even to make undertakings to government about what we will do to entrench and advance that identity in both the short and the long term. As I have stated here, the success of McMaster has been the success of an integrated and balanced model of the academic mission—one that seeks not merely to *do* both undergraduate teaching and advanced research, but that sees the two as vitally connected and indeed seeks to extend the methods and assumptions of first-class research into the creation of outstanding educational programs, naturally allowing for discrepant levels of experience and differing goals. If, like any human institution, we sometimes fall short of our own ideal, this means only that we have more work to do, not that the ideal itself is vitiated. My proposal to the University is that in the future we explicitly define ourselves as we have implicitly defined ourselves in the past, as a university dedicated in the broadest sense to the integrity of the academic mission, conforming to the principles and priorities that I have laid out here.

What do we need to do?

Universities are by their nature decentralized and intolerant of regimentation, and that is as it should be. It is the wonderful paradox of intellectual discovery that linear progress depends upon a certain amount of lateral exploration, a reality that needs to be acknowledged in both our structures and our processes. At the same time we need to seek maximum alignment and integration, which is less a consequence of regimentation than of rigour, of economy and creativity in the application of our thought and the allocation of our energies. And it is almost always the case that we are less rigorous in this sense than we should be—which is not to gainsay my observations about the historical success of McMaster. Instead it is to suggest that we will become stronger by being even more ourselves while avoiding the temptations of self-satisfaction. We need to initiate a full and radical assessment of our work in the three priority areas identified here, asking what should be done next in developing a distinct, effective and sustainable undergraduate experience, enhancing the way we see and build connections between McMaster and the community, and integrating a reconceived educational mission with continuing excellence in research.

This process needs to be undertaken at many levels simultaneously, and with some urgency. Valuable work has been done over the last year by the Refining Directions Implementation Plan Committee (RDIPC), which identified the Centre for Leadership in Learning (CLL) as an important central unit to help the University in achieving its goal of creating interactive and engaging learning environments. The CLL is however only one of a number of groups that need

to be involved in reconceiving undergraduate education at McMaster. The Faculties, Departments and individual faculty and staff members are critically important in this process; indeed, it is only within those groups that meaningful decisions can be made about the options for experiential learning and other pedagogical approaches, internationalization of the curriculum, and integration of education with research. Success in this transformation will come when we are all as individuals engaged in the process and when mutual respect and cooperation bring us into optimal alignment. Our civility, in short, will be our future.

I ask all units in the university, especially the academic faculties, to consider both the drift and details of this letter and to assess the extent to which their activities answer or could be made to answer positively its message. What changes would be necessary, and what benefits could be expected? What would be the challenges in your particular context, and if those could be overcome, how? What are the obstacles to radical changes you might wish to implement? Where your work is already moving in this direction, what resources might you require to make significant progress? In the coming months I intend to establish a number of small groups of colleagues from different disciplines to discuss and synthesize your answers to these questions about educational reform, community engagement, research and internationalization. I will announce a program of practical measures to assist in the advancement of these priorities, and we shall immediately begin working to align more closely resource allocation with strategic direction.

No less important to our future success will be continuation of the open and constructive public discussions of university issues that were begun last year. Since the good of students, graduate as well as undergraduate, is at the heart of this initiative, students must be drawn even more deeply into our discussions following release of this letter. In the coming months I expect our ongoing conversations will be as stimulating as those of the past year, though inevitably more focused now that we seek to consolidate our direction and orient ourselves to specific priorities.

With thanks and in admiration for what is achieved at McMaster every day,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Patrick Deane', written in a cursive style.

Patrick Deane
President and Vice-Chancellor

September 21, 2011