

Forward with Integrity

The Emerging Landscape

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION..... 3

 Overriding Vision..... 3

 Fundamental Operating Principles 4

 Our Distinct Identity..... 4

FLAGSHIP RECOMMENDATIONS..... 5

 Flexibility 5

 McMaster Learning Portfolio 6

 University Research Council..... 7

 Enabling Community Champions 7

 Platforms for Communication and Coordination 8

 Office of Community and Global Engagement 8

 Incentives 9

 Maintaining Momentum..... 11

APPENDIX I: PROPOSALS SUBMITTED TO FWI..... 13

INTRODUCTION

The Advisory Group (AG) was formed as part of a strategy to engage with the significant challenge posed to the University community by the President in his letter *Forward with Integrity* (FWI). In particular the AG was charged with the task of reviewing the task force position papers as well as the feedback that has been provided by the McMaster community, and participating in a dialogue with the President on ways to move forward that are consistent with his vision. This paper, which should be considered as the sequel to the original letter, is the product of this dialogue and is intended to guide institutional transformation.

The AG has proposed a series of operating principles which are fundamental to a transformational strategy for McMaster. These have been distilled from the themes and recommendations of the four task forces and complement the principles articulated in FWI. Most importantly, they are intended to set the stage for meeting the challenge articulated in FWI and defining a distinct identity for McMaster.

These operating principles set the stage for stimulating and shaping the development of new ideas and initiatives, guiding and facilitating their implementation, and providing a way to assess their degree of success. Going forward, it will be increasingly important for departments, Faculties, units and individuals seeking alignment with FWI to identify the policies and procedures at the institution that are inconsistent with these operating principles as well as those that exemplify the best intentions of FWI.

Overriding Vision

Fundamental to discussions of educational reform and the centrality of research within a renewed educational mandate is the need for an overriding vision. The AG is intrigued with the approach of '*educating for capability*', which encompasses many of the themes and recommendations of the task forces. Traditional education and training is largely concerned with competence, which is developed from knowledge, skills and attitudes. Educating for capability introduces an additional dimension for all of us: staff, students and faculty. Capability extends beyond traditional considerations to continual growth, the ability to adapt, improve performance and generate new knowledge.¹ The learning of all in the organization becomes more transformational and non-linear. This of course has implications for the activities in our teaching and learning, research and administrative environments.

This strategy should be aligned with an overall approach that recognizes and trusts the capabilities of the individuals that work at and learn in the University. The AG recommends

that the University give individuals, departments and Faculties more autonomy to make decisions and perform the tasks that are required to support and advance the vision and academic mission of the University. This autonomy would be exercised within a culture of integrity and shared responsibility as outlined in FWI. Conscientious experimentation in shaping the academic mission should be encouraged and rewarded.

Fundamental Operating Principles

McMaster will make the following commitments consistent with a culture of integrity. These commitments apply to, and can be expected by, all members of the University community:

1. To provide an environment that *educates for capability*, considers multiple perspectives, supports individuals and instills an inquiring, self-directed frame of mind.
2. To promote civility, openness and flexibility in its relationships and application of policies and procedures.
3. To strengthen its internal community as well as develop and sustain mutually beneficial connections and partnerships with local and global communities.
4. To encourage reflection and radical questioning and support responsible risk-taking.

Our Distinct Identity

The AG spent considerable time reviewing the recommendations that are the product of significant thought and goodwill within the task forces. There are many good ideas that could be adopted locally or more generally with support of community members at all levels. There is an obvious tension between moving forward as a response and moving forward in a way that creates an opportunity for sustained evolution and change. We understand that McMaster wishes to be seen as a ‘student centered, research-intensive university’ (as do many of our peers). We also understand that we have difficulty defining these terms (as do many of our peers).

It is largely true that the best learning and research occurs when the goals of the learning and research are less explicit. Uncertainty in outcomes is uncomfortable but essential to scholarship. It may however be the time to be explicit about what we mean by ‘student-centered’ and ‘research intensive’ and the links between these two central tenets. An approach of ‘educating for capability’ can help in this respect but only if we (as a community) are willing to undertake the work necessary to examine what we do at all levels.

The challenge posed by FWI may best be met by defining ourselves as a ‘*research-focused student-centered*’ University. The adoption of this distinguishing aspect means that research at

McMaster should be ambitious and bold, leading to transformative results. We need to cultivate research excellence and sustain intensity and impact, celebrate exceptional achievements and enable our best to compete successfully with the best in the world. Further, our very best research should take place within collaborative teams of faculty, staff, postdoctoral fellows, graduate and undergraduate students in which the training environment is a priority. Consistent with educating for capability, McMaster students should be aware of and engaged with the emergence of new ideas, technologies and paradigms and should be capable of both adapting to these changes and participating in their creation. Finally, McMaster should take a research-focused student-centered approach in maximizing its educational, research and administrative processes. We commit to simultaneously developing direct, objective measures of important educational and research outcomes and using them to guide our evolution.

Defining the McMaster experience as ‘research-focused student centered’ would enable the development of means to educate for capability and affirm our devotion to the cultivation of human potential.

FLAGSHIP RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations below are a practical distillation of the task force reports, but they by no means go far enough in meeting the challenge of FWI. We invite you to re-examine them and to add to them in a way that makes sense for you, your unit, your group. We also encourage you to approach members of the task forces and explore with them your ideas for new initiatives at the grassroots level; a list of task force members from across the University is available on the President’s website. In six months we will reconvene to take stock of several issues with a focus on an examination of change that has occurred. Where change has not occurred, we will ask why? When it has occurred we will ask how? We will then share this with the community and initiate a process to celebrate successes and learn from failure in a way that allows future movement.

Flexibility

A critical factor in moving forward, which was raised in all of the task force reports, was increased flexibility across the institution. Each group identified inflexibility as a barrier to creativity and innovation and recommended dismantling the overly restrictive bureaucratic processes that characterize many University policies, procedures and relationships. The AG supports this point of view, and urges the McMaster community to examine its methods and introduce flexible, streamlined and simplified procedures wherever and whenever possible.

In the curricular domain, this might be accomplished through a period of experimentation during which existing policies surrounding curricular development and change would be placed on hold or significantly modified, so that faculty are free to create a more flexible, challenging curriculum without the traditional approval processes. Further, the traditional processes could be altered to encourage early stage formative feedback rather than summative review. At the end of the period, Faculties could assess the changes that have occurred and determine what approval processes, if any, are needed in the future so that the spirit of innovation is sustained.

Some flexibility could be introduced during a period in the fall term (time for reflection) through optional week-long courses or other student development and support activities. Moreover, flexibility could be exhibited to the community through a more open campus. The community should be welcomed to participate in on-campus activities or to use some of the facilities during the weekend or summer term. Free parking should be provided on the weekend to illustrate the University's commitment to community engagement and participation. Free lecture series could be provided to members of the community, and recorded for future use, so that there is a better understanding of the role of the University and so that the community is exposed to and supported in lifelong learning. There are some successful models already in place, such as the Children and Youth University (CY@Mac) which is supported by the President's office and offers free lectures to hundreds of young learners from the local community, and the Shad Valley Program which provides University exposure to senior high school students. Others exist; besides highlighting them, it would be useful to learn from their successes and challenges.

Other creative approaches to ensuring that all aspects of the institution's functionality espouse flexibility should be considered. The AG supports experimentation and asserts that barriers to innovation should be minimized at all levels of the organization.

McMaster Learning Portfolio

The student experience task force introduced the notion of the learning portfolio which is intended to guide and track each student's unique learning journey. While there are many ways to improve the student experience at McMaster, the AG encourages consideration of the portfolio, as it appears to provide a vehicle for encouraging and capturing critical elements involved in educating for capability; these include the use of mentors, opportunities for reflection and ongoing feedback, exposing students to diverse pedagogies, encouraging exploration of interests and learning goals within and beyond formal course work, promoting an inquiring attitude, and crediting a range of learning experiences that include so-called 'co-curricular' activities including community and global educational and research experiences. The

use of the portfolio will require discussion and planning ideally at a pan-University level to reduce potential silos but early adoption could occur at the program or department level with the broader community benefitting from lessons learned. The best conceptualization of a portfolio is as a record of the student experience and if undertaken in a serious way, it could appropriately replace or become an adjunct to the traditional transcript. Nevertheless, it is critical that the University community work together to create an environment that educates for capability and is in keeping with our fundamental operating principles.

University Research Council

The research task force identified a series of challenges facing researchers at McMaster. The AG endorses the proposal that the VP Research and International Affairs form a University Research Council, to include the Associate Deans of Research, AVP Research, and relevant administrative staff as a communal vehicle to address many of these issues. Indeed, subsequent discussions with the Vice President indicated that the process was already underway. The mandate of the Council would evolve, and it would have as a prime function ongoing information-sharing across the institution. In addition, it could include the following as priority issues: considering the creation of 'research mentors' in each Faculty to assist with grant applications; forming a network of research administrative support within the Faculties that works in coordination with central research services; reviewing administrative policies and procedures and making recommendations that would facilitate research success and nurture the culture of research at McMaster that already exists; reviewing the allocation and enhancement of resources to best support and sustain research excellence, intensity and impact; and identifying opportunities to enable cross-disciplinary research and to build and sustain internationally competitive research and training. It would fall within the mandate of the Council, working with the Deans, to consider and respond to issues or initiatives related to sustaining our reputation for research excellence and intensity. The Council would provide a natural forum for the Associate Deans to share best practice in integrating research and teaching, fostering research excellence in new appointments, encouraging research intensity, maximizing impact, and ensuring that our very best researchers attain appropriate external recognition. Finally, the Council would ensure that the research priorities of the University and the Faculties remain aligned and that strategic opportunities are acted upon with a coordinated effort.

Enabling Community Champions

The community engagement task force emphasized the need for local champions in order to reinforce the importance of community links and scholarship at the University. Individuals with particular community expertise and interest should be given the opportunity to focus on

developing this area within their unit/Faculty, and be given time and support to do so. They should be encouraged to mentor others by forming a network to share their experiences and partnerships and work together to strengthen the University's relationship with the community in support of the academic mission. This can be facilitated through the identification and celebration of existing champions and models of success, such as the MacWheelers and Discovery programs. Consideration should also be given to the incorporation of community engagement leave into (or as an alternative to) faculty research leave so that individuals have the opportunity for an immersion experience or to focus their teaching on community engaged scholarship. Finally, a President's Award for Community Engagement should be created.

Platforms for Communication and Coordination

All of the task forces identified the lack of institutional cohesion with respect to knowledge of opportunities and best practices, as well as general awareness of diverse University initiatives. The University must identify and support interested individuals to develop platforms for communication and coordination. The following examples of platforms distilled from the task force papers should be considered: networks/communities of practice; inventories/websites of programs, initiatives, projects and expertise; and physical and/or virtual space and tools for conversation within and beyond Faculty borders. Development of communication tools need not require significant resources if we draw on, for example, the wealth of expertise and enthusiasm in the student population. Students are eager to engage with University issues and obtain credit for their work and this should be supported. The development and preservation of effective communication platforms will require collaboration and coordination across many units at the institution. Initiatives such as the new ERP and alternative budget model present opportunities for enabling institutional coordination and improved communication.

Office of Community and Global Engagement

Internationalization – its definition, positioning, and approach – was posed as somewhat of a conundrum in the President's letter. The internationalization task force highlighted the diversity of international activity at the University and articulated different models and principles to guide international scholarship. The task force also noted that, as in other areas, the University's international activities are fragmented and uncoordinated and that there is a need for a cohesive vision to drive McMaster's international efforts. As part of articulating a vision, the University must first decide on the intended prominence of internationalization as a defining feature of the institution.

The AG agrees with the need to coordinate, highlight and promote international activities in education and research which in many respects, but not all, parallels the needs related to local

community engagement. The task force's proposal for a Centre for Global Engagement is intriguing, but implementation would be premature in the absence of an academic vision. Consideration of such a prominent entity should wait for further clarification of the University's academic aspirations related to internationalization. Moreover, in the international sphere, there currently exist several offices and portfolios related to international work. As a first step, it would be prudent to examine the mandates of existing offices and officers dedicated to international activity and consider whether the current organization could be better structured, coordinated and publicized.

In parallel, to address the need for consolidated service and available expertise in the educational and research realms, the AG would recommend consideration of an Office for Community and Global Engagement that is a potential reorganization and augmentation of existing structures. This approach would allow us to identify synergies and commonalities between local and global engagement where they exist. The directive for the office would include but not be limited to: developing a strategic approach to community engagement and internationalization; maintaining the requisite expertise in negotiating and collaborating with partners; promoting local and global perspectives as part of the graduate and undergraduate curriculum; creating, promoting and maintaining an inventory of international and community-based activities and programs at McMaster; establishing a long-term plan for sustaining existing initiatives and responding to opportunities; and facilitating University-wide seminar series and forums on international and community engaged research.

Incentives

The AG supports the emphasis placed by all the task forces on the need for incentives to encourage participation in new initiatives. Motivation arises in a variety of contexts, including receptivity, recognition, credit, career progression or remuneration. The AG recommends consideration of the following, most of which were suggested by the task forces and are by no means exhaustive: student credit for participating in research, community and international initiatives; faculty recognition for efforts, whether successful or failed, in the CP/M system; flexibility in the allocation of faculty responsibilities to allow for short term focus in an area of development or expertise that benefits the broader constituency; acknowledgement of members of the community who volunteer at McMaster; and rewards to administrative areas that identify and remove barriers to flexibility and internal coordination. These efforts should culminate in an annual public event to recognize and celebrate the significant achievements of individuals or groups that are consistent with FWI.

SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

The Advisory Group has proposed a set of fundamental operating principles that would distinguish McMaster in the fulfillment of its academic mission and obligation to society more generally. The group acknowledges the dedication and perseverance of the task force members, who were committed to honest discussion of challenges and opportunities for the University, as well as strategies for moving forward. The recommendations in the task force position papers have been considered as part of an institutional strategy and can be repeatedly revisited to cull specific ideas, as appropriate. There is now a need for Faculties, departments, central units and individuals to identify and implement approaches within their own environments that are consistent with the FWI operating principles and that advance our shared mission. Means of soliciting and supporting grassroots level initiatives should be established at the same time as institution-wide changes are prioritized and undertaken so that individuals at all levels of the institution will feel engaged and have their efforts validated and acknowledged.

In order to transition into and sustain a period of implementation, the AG proposes that:

- The currently constituted senior management groups of President/Vice-Presidents (PVP) and Deans/Provost (D/P) come together as PVPD with collective responsibility for ensuring adherence to FWI operating principles and for overseeing implementation of FWI initiatives, with individual members assuming responsibility for initiatives that fall within their respective portfolios. The PVPD group should consult with the community, and in particular with members of the FWI task forces, to ensure that the intended interpretation of the position papers and grassroots ideas is accomplished.
- Individuals from all areas of the institution should be encouraged to bring ideas forward and share them within their departments, Faculties and units and beyond, as appropriate. When ideas can be supported and readily implemented at a local level, they should be attempted. Department chairs/unit directors should acknowledge successes and attempt to understand failures at the local level and share this knowledge with the PVPD group. There should be an annual, University-wide public event to recognize and celebrate FWI-related initiatives.
- The 'call to action' must also be accompanied by formal processes for receiving and evaluating proposals for University-wide initiatives, as well as for more locally-based initiatives that cannot be adequately supported at the local level. PVPD (or a subset of members and/or others, led by the Provost) should be mobilized to establish a protocol that

would assess initiatives that come forward, either to remove barriers that limit transformation, or to experiment with an idea that has the potential to enhance the University.

Maintaining Momentum

The University community has largely responded to the FWI letter and task force papers with enthusiasm and optimism; individuals and groups have used the documents as lenses through which to assess and plan their activities and operations. The AG has received a number of ideas and detailed proposals and the broader institution appears to be engaged in aligning activities with FWI; this input has informed the perspective of the AG as outlined in this document. The participation of the McMaster community has been both motivating and encouraging to the AG and has occurred in a variety of forms:

- **Proposals and ideas for consideration**

The AG has received written submissions related to the following areas: knowledge sharing, data analysis and technology, new courses, centres or programs that foster self-directed and/or experiential learning or serve to better integrate research and education, potential space for dialogue and collaboration, opportunities to engage and sustain relationships with the local and global communities, including Aboriginal, and suggestions for enhancing interdisciplinarity. With the authors' permission, these have been listed in Appendix I.

- **Commitments of support**

A variety of representatives of central administrative and ancillary units have provided assistance by describing how they are aligning existing and proposed activities with FWI or by providing information to aid in decision-making or implementation plans. These interactions include correspondence from the Budget Model Implementation Planning Committee and from the Office of the AVP (Administration) and CFO as well as dialogue with the McMaster Student Union (MSU) and Graduate Student Association (GSA).

- **Consultations regarding alignment**

The AG has participated in meetings with a number of administrative and ancillary teams from across the University interested in discussing FWI and the task force papers and determining how their actions can be best aligned with the institutional direction. These include conversations with the VP Research and International Affairs as well as the Systems Renewal (ERP) Steering Committee. Further, presentations have been made to several academic and administrative units to engage the broader community in the dialogue arising from FWI; these have involved Financial Affairs, Human Resources, University

Advancement, the Risk Office, the Engineering Dean's Advisory Board, Faculty retreats and the McMaster Foundation.

- **Developments Underway**

Since the distribution of the letter, activities that are aligned with FWI have occurred at all levels of the University; some of these efforts have been described in articles published in the Daily News regarding the efforts and emerging strategies of each Faculty. More recently, other initiatives have been planned that begin to realize some of the ideas outlined in the task force papers. These include the President's Forum on Community-Exchanged Education which involved participants from McMaster and surrounding communities, and a President's Retreat focusing on enhancing teaching and learning, which draws from the recommendations of the task forces.

The summary above captures only those activities submitted to or involving the AG; there are undoubtedly others under development and we encourage individuals to begin discussions with their unit leaders or others as appropriate to investigate the potential of their ideas to align with the directions in FWI.

The multitude of efforts reinforces the initial strategy to involve all parts of the University in moving FWI forward. All submissions that the AG has received will be shared with the PVPD to give them a sense of the grassroots enthusiasm and to facilitate their conversations with the community. An Appendix listing the authors and general subjects of the proposals has been appended to this document; those who wish to discuss the proposals may contact the author(s) directly.

Reference: [1] S. W. Fraser and T. Greenhalgh, Coping with complexity: educating for capability, *British Medical Journal*, **2001**, 323, 799.

APPENDIX I: PROPOSALS SUBMITTED TO FWI

The following table outlines the author(s) and subject matter of the proposals that have been submitted to FWI; only those authors who agreed to the distribution of this information have been included.

Name	Faculty/Unit	Subject/Title
David Harris Smith	Faculty of Humanities	Open Source Knowledge Sharing
Rama Singh	Faculty of Science	Strategies for Internationalization
Carolyn Eyles and Jean Wilson	Integrated Science Program (Faculty of Science) and Arts & Science	Interdisciplinary Experiences Course
John W. Ford and Judy Major-Girardin	Faculty of Humanities	Centre for Arts Research and Global Outreach (CARGO)
Lydia Garland	Faculty of Health Sciences	Redefining Teaching Assistantships, Creating an Inclusive Culture, Restructuring the Working Environment
Dale Askey	McMaster University Libraries	Research Use of Library Space
Peter L. Hill	Alumni	Course for Prospective Politicians
David Venus	Faculty of Science	Fostering the Capacity for Research in Undergraduate Education
Abigail Payne, Jeremiah Hurley, John Cairney, Byron Spencer	Faculties of Social Sciences and Health Sciences	Centre for Data Procurement Analysis