

# Partnered in Teaching and Learning

**McMASTER'S TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGY  
2021–2026**

**BRIGHTER  
WORLD**



Innovations in teaching and learning are foundational to what we do at McMaster. Wherever our students are learning—whether in the classroom, laboratory, studio, field, virtual space, or community—we want to create an environment that fosters outstanding learning experiences that are driven by curiosity and backed by evidence-based practices. Our instructors, researchers and teaching assistants are critical team members in supporting a holistic student experience, and they are already reinventing traditional teaching methods to fully engage students as partners in their learning. We continue to innovate by challenging the modes and methods of teaching and learning delivery and always striving for excellence.

This strategy requires a shared, cross-campus commitment which will bring forward new and transformative collaborations, more inclusive and accessible spaces, and unique opportunities for students to learn beyond the classroom and outside the institution. I look forward to supporting and championing this strategy over the next five years and witnessing the work of our community to advance teaching and learning at McMaster.

## Susan Tighe

**Provost and Vice-President Academic**



Over the last two years, I have had the privilege of engaging in conversations with our students, faculty, instructors, and staff on the future of teaching and learning at McMaster. I have also seen our campus community rise to unprecedented challenges with passion and creativity. Our new strategy for teaching and learning partnerships is a testament to this. Emerging out of diverse conversations across campus, our Partnered in Teaching and Learning initiative celebrates a rich history of teaching at McMaster and highlights our commitment to engaged learning, founded on four key commitments - encouraging partnered and interdisciplinary learning, fostering a holistic and personalized student experience, fostering inclusive and scholarly learning, and developing active and flexible learning spaces.

We look ahead to new opportunities for innovation and creativity in partnerships across our learning communities, both on and off campus, giving learners real voice in their education, and empowering educators to explore new ways of engaging with students. I am looking forward to seeing the strategy come to life over the next five years. Thank you to everyone for contributing to vibrant discussions on teaching and learning, not just over the last year, but since the founding of McMaster University.

## Kim Dej

**Acting Vice-Provost (Faculty)**

# Teaching and Learning at McMaster

At McMaster, we work together to make people's lives better. Our partnered approach to teaching and learning means our students, instructors and researchers form a community of creative problem-solvers, ready to tackle some of the world's toughest challenges by breaking down silos and collaborating across disciplines.

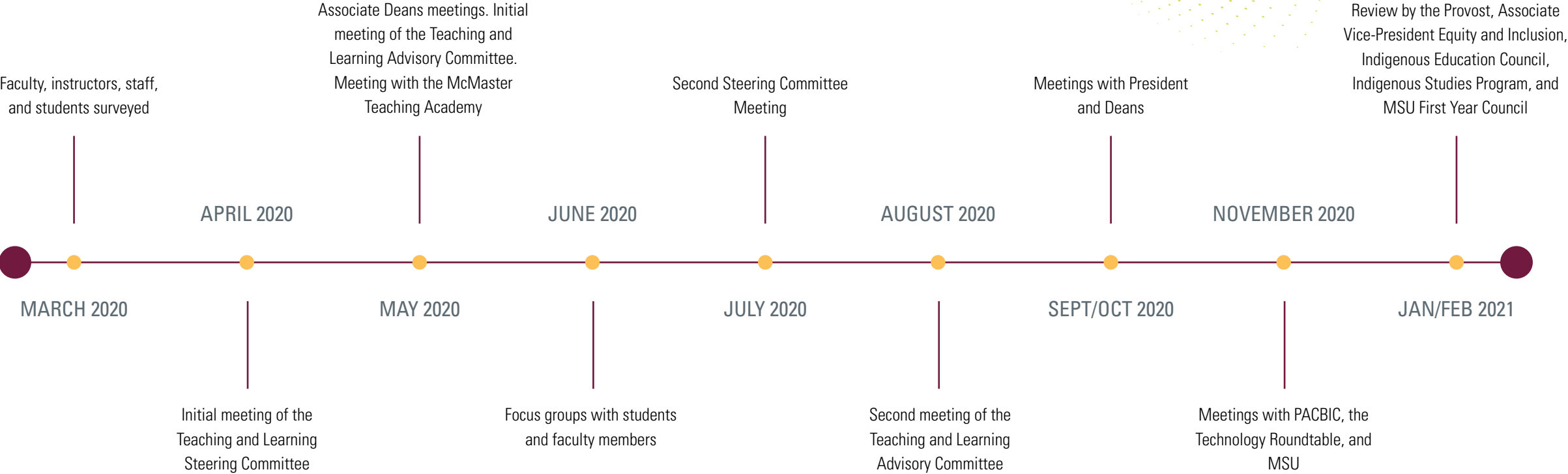
The Teaching and Learning Strategy 2021–2026 puts into writing much of what's already happening across our campus. McMaster is recognized globally for our innovative approaches to teaching and learning and has been since the university founded problem-based learning in the late 1960s. Ten years later, McMaster became one of the first universities to create an Institute for Innovation and Excellence in Teaching and Learning. This institute, now known as the MacPherson Institute, continues to provide leading pedagogical research, support and innovation to programs and instructors across the university. McMaster instructors have received international recognition for their groundbreaking work in the classroom and beyond, and as Canada's most research-intensive university our students have unique opportunities to be part of the research enterprise beginning in their undergraduate degrees.

But we know we can always go further than where we stand today. It's our goal and responsibility to advance teaching and learning at McMaster to support curiosity, build interdisciplinarity, and ultimately advance human and societal health and well-being. **Partnered in Teaching and Learning: McMaster's Teaching and Learning Strategy 2021–2026** lays out a plan to grow our teaching and learning excellence, to continue to lead into the future, and to provide McMaster students with unique ways of building their own knowledge and potential.



# Shaping the Teaching and Learning Strategy

Over 2020, we engaged in dialogues across campus with individuals and groups that are connected to teaching and learning activities including instructors, staff and students. Feedback from our teaching and learning community was used to develop this strategy and help us work together towards a shared purpose.





## Partnered in Teaching and Learning

The goal of this strategy is to encourage collaborative partnerships across all areas of campus, building on the expertise of our whole community to ultimately inspire and support excellence in teaching and learning. To achieve this we are reimagining how we approach the student learning experience; improving relationships between instructors, students and staff across the institution; working towards inclusive excellence; and thinking creatively about our learning spaces.

Our commitment to advancing teaching and learning is summarized in the following four strategies. Each strategy shines a light on relevant themes related to the activities and objectives to be accomplished.

**ENCOURAGING PARTNERED AND  
INTERDISCIPLINARY LEARNING**

**SUPPORTING A HOLISTIC AND  
PERSONALIZED STUDENT EXPERIENCE**

**FOSTERING INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE  
AND SCHOLARLY TEACHING**

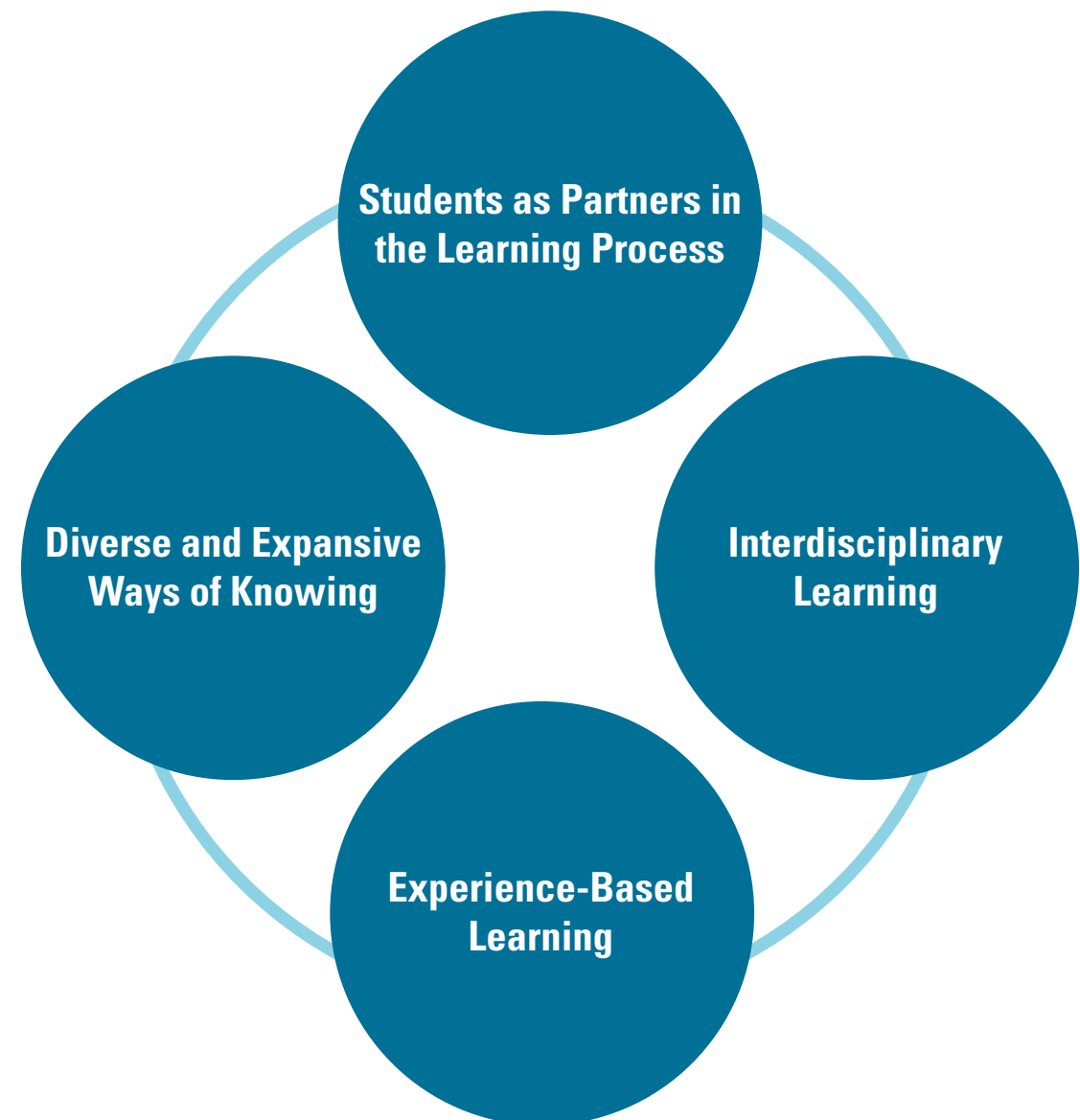
**DEVELOPING ACTIVE AND FLEXIBLE  
LEARNING SPACES**



## Encouraging Partnered and Interdisciplinary Learning

Students are partners in the learning process—we want to inspire them to explore their curiosity beyond their program, department or Faculty. By engaging in interdisciplinary teaching and learning, students can open their minds to diverse perspectives, sparking new ideas and smart collaborations. And by facilitating fluid learning environments, we can make way for more interactive and simulating learning experiences.

Within Partnered and Interdisciplinary Learning, we recognize several important themes and corresponding objectives.



ENCOURAGING  
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### Students as Partners in the Learning Process

Engagement comes naturally when students drive their own learning through curiosity and excitement. To encourage this, we need to continue to reimagine how we teach and give students the tools they need to decide their own unique learning path.

#### Objective

- Design, implement and evaluate structures that enable students to be active partners in the learning process engaged through peer support, mentorship, teaching, research, and community learning.

### Diverse and Expansive Ways of Knowing

Knowledge comes in so many forms beyond traditional academic texts and exercises. We must recognize that critical knowledge and creativity stems from each student and instructor's unique identity, background and perspective, and respect diverse and expansive ways of knowing. We are committed to creating inclusive space for these perspectives. Doing so will support student success and retention, and ultimately foster a strong sense of community at McMaster.

#### Objectives

- Implement initiatives that respond to the intersection of equity, diversity and inclusion and teaching and learning strategies.
- Evaluate opportunities for Indigenous self-determination in teaching and learning to be acknowledged.
- Develop strategies to ensure diverse perspectives and expansive ways of knowing are respected and valued.
- In both face-to-face and online formats, ensure that teaching and learning is inclusive and reciprocal by involving students in discussions and decisions around teaching and faculty development.
- Identify, support and promote opportunities to develop cultural competencies.



## Interdisciplinary Learning

Learning across disciplines helps students problem-solve beyond traditional categories of learning and prepares them with skills for life. By creating opportunities for instructors to collaborate in teaching and by practicing flexibility, we can make interdisciplinary teaching and learning more accessible to instructors and students.

### Objectives

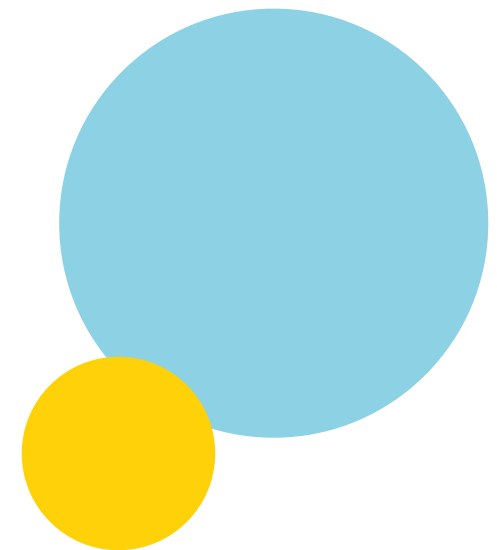
- Identify and remove structural barriers (policies, processes, practices) to enable interdisciplinary learning across the university.
- Enable, support, recognize and reward interdisciplinary teaching and learning.
- Develop pan-university models for teaching numeracy and literacy skill development across disciplines.

## Experience-Based Learning

Learning isn't just limited to what happens in the classroom. By learning through experience, students engage with challenges that promote collaboration while developing necessary skills for making an impact both locally and globally. From co-ops and internships to independent studies, research, and community-based activities, experience-based learning can take so many forms. Students often leave these experiences with specialized knowledge, new ways of collaborating, deeper connections to their community and a desire to put their learning into practice.

### Objectives

- Conceptually define "experienced-based learning" for McMaster.
- Enhance and expand experienced-based learning, locally and globally, and provide different approaches to teaching and learning that are focused on skills development, application and reflection.
- Identify land-based educational opportunities for Indigenous learners.



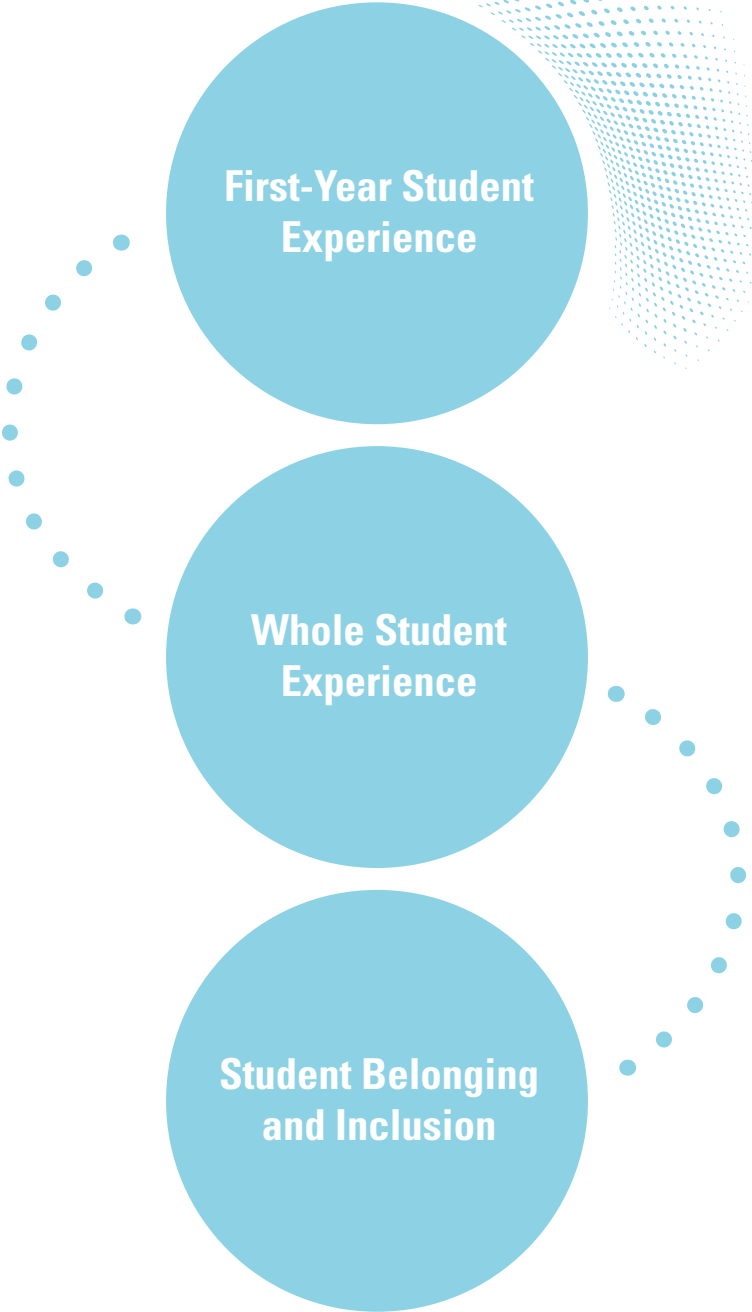




# Supporting a Holistic and Personalized Student Experience

Teaching and learning is a critical part of the student experience, but academics are only one piece of the puzzle. Students are at the core of what we do, and we must consider how they benefit from both their individual learning experiences and experiences outside the classroom. Through guided discovery beginning in students’ first year of studies, they can craft a holistic and tailored student experience that will enhance their health and wellness, sense of belonging, connectedness, and safety in our community.

Within Holistic and Personalized Student Experience, we recognize several important themes and corresponding objectives.



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SUPPORTING A HOLISTIC AND PERSONALIZED STUDENT EXPERIENCE

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### First-Year Experience

Starting your post-secondary studies should be a time of curiosity and inspiration. We plan to explore opportunities to enhance the first-year student experience to spark ideas across all disciplines, build confidence and resilience, and develop strong academic skills.

#### Objective

- Implement opportunities for first year students to engage in small group learning experiences, high impact learning practices and interdisciplinary learning to foster curiosity and possibility.

### Whole Student Experience

We recognize that academics, extracurricular activities, and social connections are all critical to student success. We must consider all of these criteria when supporting student learning.

#### Objectives

- Identify structures in which students can represent their whole experience. ( e.g. academic, extracurricular, etc.).
- Remove barriers and promote flexibility and choice for students upon entry into programs and throughout program progression allowing a personalized educational experience.



### Student Belonging and Inclusion

We are committed to fostering learning communities that are built on respect and a sense of belonging. By integrating equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility into everything we do, as well as keeping safety and student wellness top of mind, we can better support our students both inside and outside of the classroom.

#### Objectives

- Expand adoption and continually enhance teaching development opportunities for educators around student mental health, inclusion, accessibility and safety needs (e.g., course design, compassionate response to student needs, etc.).
- Reimagine the complete picture of “campus life” with consideration for the student as well their families, communities and virtual lives.
- Support opportunities for students to participate in their cultures on campus.

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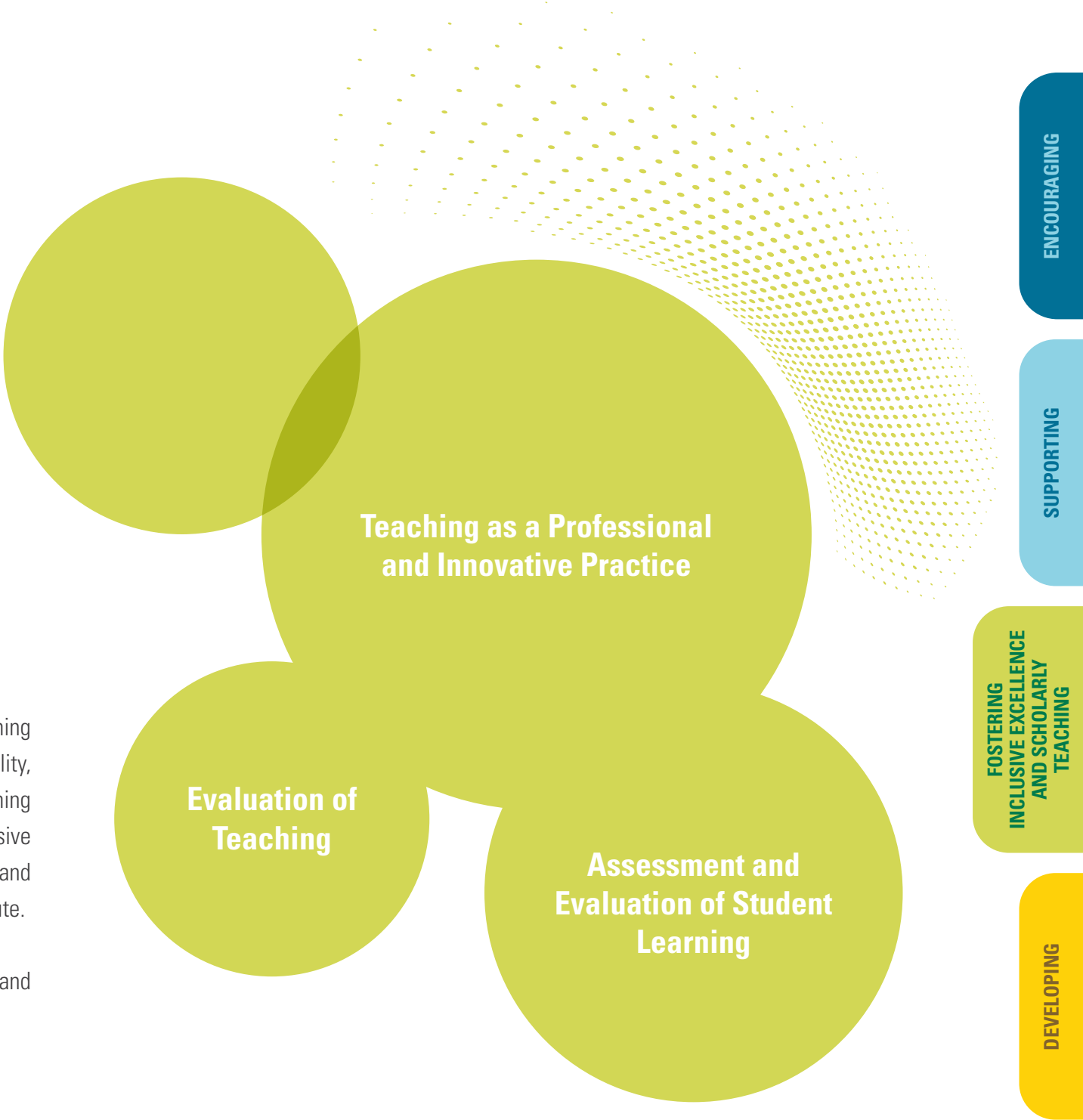
DEVELOPING



# Fostering Inclusive Excellence and Scholarly Teaching

Instructors are encouraged to take risks in their pedagogy and experiment with novel teaching practices—we want them to have the tools and support they need to model courage, vulnerability, and openness in their classrooms. We are also looking to further integrate research and teaching across the university to ignite inspiration among our educators. In order to advance inclusive teaching, we will align our efforts with the strategies identified by our Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, Indigenous Research and Education Strategy, and the MacPherson Institute.

Within Inclusive and Scholarly Teaching, we recognize several important themes and corresponding objectives.



### Inclusive Excellence in Teaching

The holistic student experience depends on learning activities that are inclusive and foster a sense of belonging. To support this, we are committed to recognizing and promoting scholarly teaching excellence that integrates the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion.

#### Objective

- Emphasize inclusive excellence in teaching.

### Teaching as a Professional and Innovative Practice

McMaster is recognized as Canada's most research-intensive university—but our instructors are also on the leading edge of pedagogical development and innovation. It is essential that we ensure teaching excellence is equally valued, recognized and supported at the university.

#### Objectives

- Refine policies and processes to demonstrate that teaching is valued and recognized as a professional practice.
- Build a culture that values innovative, experimental and playful mindsets.
- Establish a knowledge translation and exchange process to support research-based teaching practice.

### Assessment and Evaluation of Student Learning

There are so many ways to assess learning, and we want to encourage instructors to push the boundaries of traditional assessment and evaluation methods. Innovative assessments can promote learning and creativity, provide opportunities to check in on student progress, and serve as catalysts for conversations around how students can keep growing.

#### Objectives

- Develop meaningful, authentic assessments that promote learning and explore opportunities to reduce the use of high stakes exams where appropriate.
- Enable learning environments that foster collaborative projects and evaluations.

### Evaluation of Teaching

Evaluation of teaching needs to be multi-faceted and include self-reflection, peer observations and student voices. We are committed to ensuring that quality, relevance and impact of teaching is valued.

#### Objective

- Review how teaching is evaluated and refine policies and processes to ensure a multi-faceted approach to evaluation is implemented.

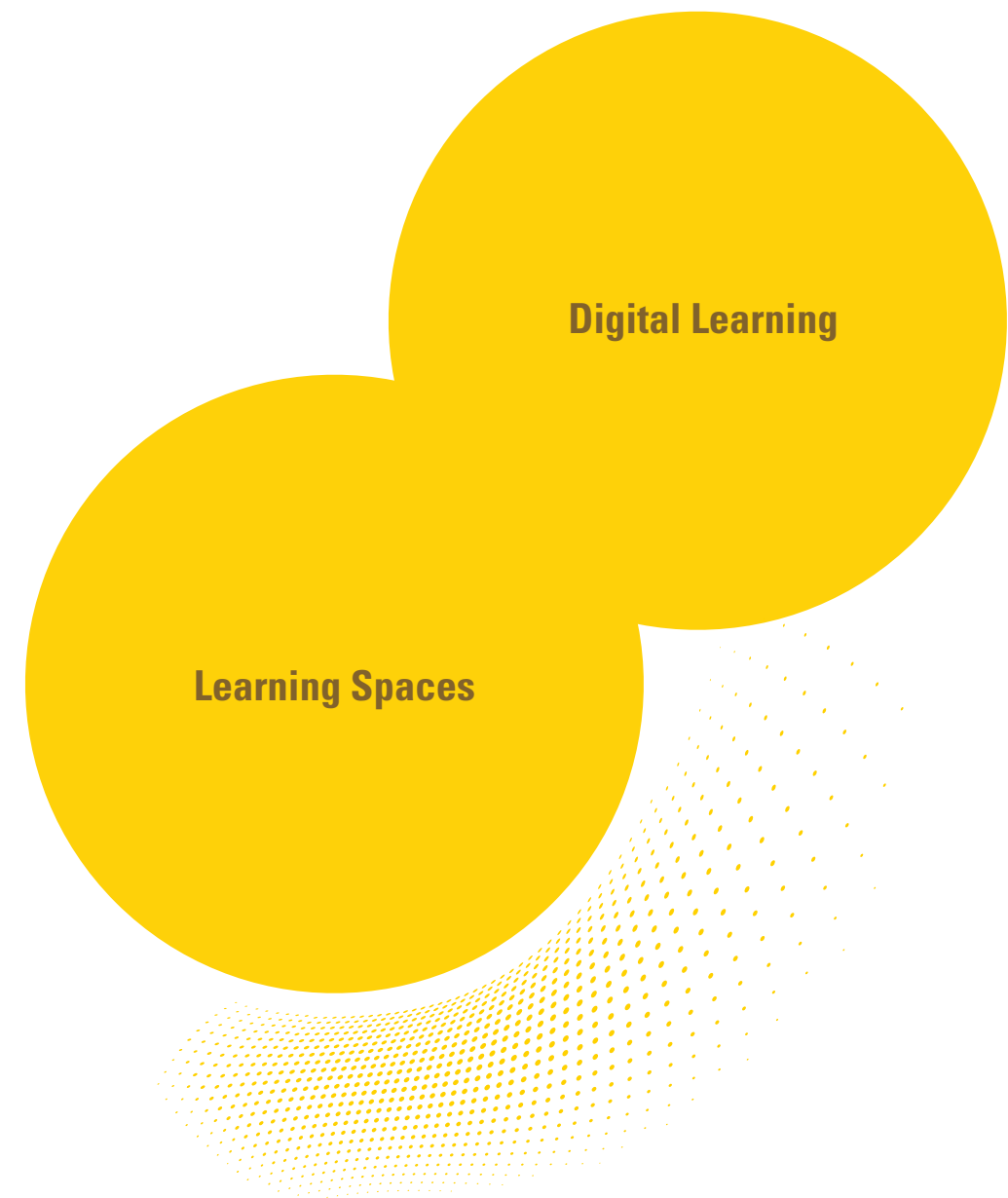




## Developing Active and Flexible Learning Spaces

Whether online or in-person, we are committed to using our learning spaces with intention and purpose. Our approach needs to start with learning outcomes, and we will continue to adjust our spaces to meet those outcomes. By offering flexible learning spaces, we can support a broader range of teaching and learning activities to further engage our students. We are also committed to designing our spaces with accessibility and inclusivity in mind in order to meet the diverse needs of our community.

Within Active and Flexible Learning Spaces, we recognize two important themes and corresponding objectives.



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## Learning Spaces

The spaces where our instructors teach and our students learn have an important impact on the overall learning experience. We want to think of learning spaces as more than just desks and chairs. We need to have a wide array of spaces that serve the needs of our instructors and students—this includes spaces that are tech-integrated, community-based, modular, virtual and more.

### Objectives

- Develop best practices for learning that are focused on the intentional consideration and integration of on-campus learning spaces (classrooms, labs, studios), online learning spaces, and community spaces for learning.
- Review and update the scheduling process so it is pedagogically focused and reflects a changing environment and the current teaching and learning needs.
- Design new physical and virtual spaces to be universally accessible, meaning they are designed to be supportive, barrier-free, mental health positive, and adherent to policies relating to health, safety, accessibility and inclusion while respecting diverse ways of knowing.

## Digital Learning

We recognize how online and virtual classrooms have changed the teaching and learning environment for both our educators and our students. We'll be taking a pedagogical and evidence-informed approach to make decisions about tools, platforms and approaches that can help us optimize learning.

### Objectives

- Develop and implement a clear Digital Learning Strategy that enhances and complements the face-to-face learning experience.





## Strategy Enablement

Change is complex, and new initiatives usually require additional supports and resources. In order for this strategy to be effective, we must explore ways to support innovators while they develop new pedagogies and redesign existing approaches to teaching. In order to enable this strategy, we are committed to establishing a granting process to support the implementation of the objectives outlined in this plan through various departmental and university-wide initiatives.

Additionally, it is critically important that we monitor our progress as we work to build on our teaching excellence. The Office of the Provost will report back to McMaster University annually to communicate progress on the strategy and share successes. This strategy is intended to be a living document that will adapt to changing circumstances. Through annual reflection and reporting, we will re-prioritize or address gaps as new opportunities or challenges come to light.

