Connect. Inspire. Transform.

2023-2030 Academic Plan

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Mount Royal University is located in the traditional territories

of the Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) and the people of the Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta,

which includes the Siksika, the Piikani, the Kainai, the Tsuut'ina, and the Îyârhe Nakoda.

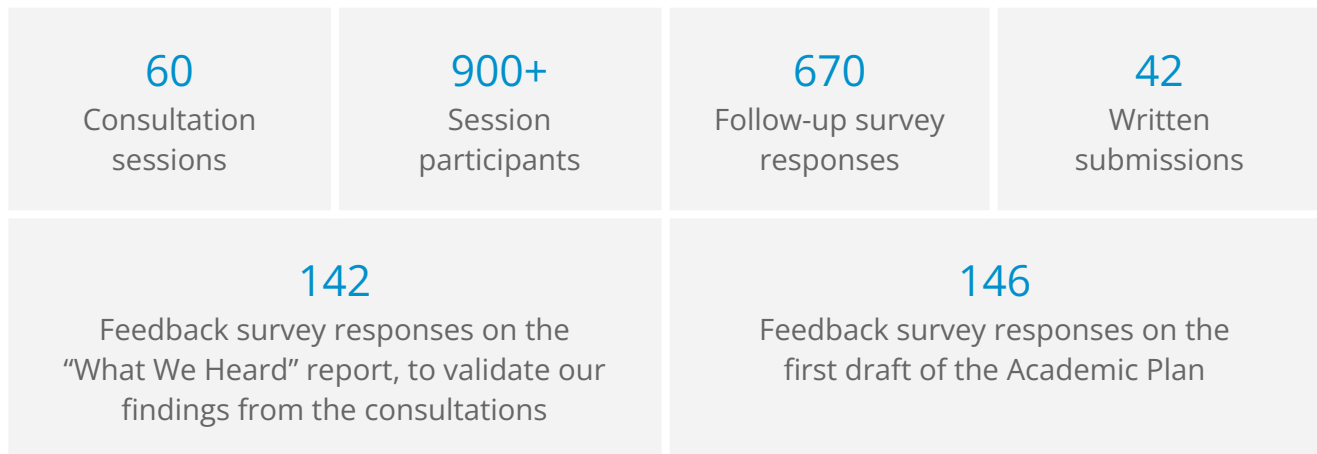*The City of Calgary is also home to the Métis Nation.*

Overview

The 2023-2030 Academic Plan sets Mount Royal University's academic direction until 2030 and beyond. It establishes the top seven priorities and 21 initiatives that we will address to achieve the academic goals set out in Mount Royal's 2023-2030 University Strategic Plan.

A plan for our community

Led by Dr. Chad London, Provost and Vice-President, Academic, guided by the Academic Plan Steering Committee, and supported by the Office of Institutional Research and Planning, the 2023-2030 Academic Plan is the result of extensive consultations with Mount Royal faculty, staff, students, alumni and external partners. We are grateful for the time, effort and insights of all community members who participated in this important process.

60 Consultation sessions	**900+** Session participants	**670** Follow-up survey responses	**42** Written submissions

142 Feedback survey responses on the "What We Heard" report, to validate our findings from the consultations	**146** Feedback survey responses on the first draft of the Academic Plan

The Academic Plan is a directional document, designed to inform strategic decision-making and resource allocation across the institution. While it does not cover all of the important work we do to deliver a high-quality academic experience, the Academic Plan does provide a focused and verified pathway to becoming a stronger and better Mount Royal, based on the collective view of our community.

The Academic Plan informs Faculty planning and the Research and Scholarship Plan. It also influences other divisional and cross-institutional planning, all of which are critical to Mount Royal's academic success. Learn more about Mount Royal's strategic planning at mru.ca/StrategicPlan.

Vision

Opening Minds and Changing Lives

Opening Minds and Changing Lives reflects our dedication to providing students with a holistic and transformative education, preparing them to become lifelong learners and active global citizens.

Through their academic experiences and as members of a diverse, inclusive, and supportive community, students will be equipped with the knowledge and skills they need to develop to their full potential.

Mission

To provide meaningful and engaged learning opportunities that create individual transformation and societal benefit.

We recognize that every learner who comes to Mount Royal has their own aspirations for pursuing a university education. Knowing their reasons for attending university are as unique as they are, we strive to provide all students with enriching learning opportunities that help them discover and cultivate the knowledge and skills they need to succeed and make a lasting impact on today's changing world.

Values

We recognize the importance of creating a culture where community members share deeply held values. Our shared values will guide our decisions and actions as we work to fulfil our mission and vision.

- Transformation
- Belonging
- Boldness
- Inquisitiveness
- Authenticity

Learn more about Mount Royal's vision, mission and values at mru.ca/StrategicPlan.

Connect. Inspire. Transform.

At the heart of the 2023-2030 Academic Plan is a desire to remain true to who we are — **a student-focused undergraduate university built on teaching excellence and grounded in community** — while embracing the vast societal changes we face in today's world.

There is much for us to celebrate at Mount Royal. Our top-calibre programs and high-quality teaching and learning experience are among our greatest strengths. We take pride in our robust delivery of liberal education, scholarly teaching, experiential learning and undergraduate research. We offer extensive supports and services to help students achieve their goals. And, we are a diverse and tightly-knit community, where students, faculty, staff and alumni can know each other by name — and where everyone is welcome.

What we heard from the community is a need for a meaningful, useful and achievable plan that builds upon what we are already doing well and pursues new opportunities that align with our strengths. The Academic Plan reflects this.

This plan also focuses on strengthening connections with people. Through enriched learning experiences and opportunities for growth through self-reflection, we can inspire the changes from within needed to transform lives and shape our communities. As we implement this plan, "Connect. Inspire. Transform." will guide each step we take:

Connect

- We will connect students to more enriched learning experiences.
- We will connect students with each other by fostering greater intercultural competence.
- We will connect students and employees in a more inclusive and welcoming community.

Inspire

- We will inspire employees to explore new and innovative ways to better support students.
- We will inspire students to positively impact others and contribute to their communities.
- We will inspire students and employees to be active and engaged members of our community.

Transform

- We will transform lives by supporting and cultivating personal and professional growth.
- We will transform our delivery of education through improved processes and practices.
- We will transform our communities through strengthened connections and partnerships.

Strategic priorities and initiatives

We identified **seven strategic priorities** and **21 supporting initiatives** to help us achieve the academic goals set out in the University Strategic Plan. Though presented in the order below, these strategic priorities are of equal importance.

Growth and access

We expect the demand for access to post-secondary education in Alberta to increase over the coming years. To meet demand, we will work collaboratively across academic faculties and divisions to develop a sustainable approach to growth, with sufficient resources to ensure we continue to provide the high quality of education and student-centred approach for which we are known.

To support growth and meet emerging societal needs, we will explore new programs as well as credentials that provide more flexible education options. We will also expand admission pathways for students who have traditionally faced exclusionary barriers to accessing and completing post-secondary education, such as Indigenous students, racialized students, students with disabilities and first-generation students.

Strategic priority: Sustainably grow enrolment, programming and pathways to respond to projected demand for high-quality post-secondary education.

Supporting initiatives:

- Develop a cross-institutional Strategic Enrolment Management plan to achieve 10% growth in undergraduate students and 10% growth in Continuing Education students by 2030.

- Launch new programs and stackable credentials, such as post-graduate programs (certificates and diplomas) and micro-credentials, to address the evolving education and career goals of learners and the needs of employers.

- Expand admission pathways and retention strategies for equity-denied students to provide greater opportunities for academic success.

Resources and implementation: We recognize sustainable enrolment growth is contingent on appropriate funding and resource availability. The development of a Strategic Enrolment Management plan will play an integral role in realizing this strategic priority.

Liberal education

Liberal education[1] is an approach to education that aims to develop well-rounded students through the exploration of a wide range of disciplines, including the arts, social sciences, natural and mathematical sciences, and professional programs. At Mount Royal, General Education[2] and experiential learning[3] are two ways we deliver a broad liberal education. Through these components, we will prioritize students' development of transversal skills[4], which include critical and innovative thinking, interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, global stewardship, media and information literacy, and more.

General Education

Mount Royal has a well-established General Education provision with a unique model that ensures students receive a well-rounded education by exposing them to different subjects and perspectives. There is now a desire to reshape General Education to better deliver a liberal education that meets the needs of today's learners.

We will explore thematic pathways and other possibilities to increase the value of General Education for students while meeting the intended outcomes of the program. This includes expanding professional development for faculty to foster excellence in interdisciplinary teaching. We will also ensure the value of General Education is well understood by students — during *and* after the course of their studies — and that faculty across the institution play a stronger role in its delivery and ongoing development.

Strategic priority: Strengthen General Education to better prepare students with essential knowledge and skills for academic success, professional growth and the broader aims of a liberal education.

Supporting initiatives:

- Revise the General Education model to support students in shaping their education around their goals, interests, prior learning experiences and program of study, while engaging a broad liberal education.

- Increase supports for faculty to develop and deliver a liberal education.

- Develop an ongoing strategy to ensure students understand the value of General Education, and faculty and staff can better support its role in a Mount Royal education.

Resources and implementation: Strengthening General Education will be a multi-year effort involving input across all faculties. Investments in instructional resources and curriculum development will be central in realizing this strategic priority.

Experiential learning

Experiential learning provides enriched learning opportunities, inside and outside of the classroom, where students learn through action and reflection. At Mount Royal, we pride ourselves on delivering a wide range of high-quality experiential learning opportunities, such as field schools, simulation learning, practicums, research opportunities, work-integrated learning and more. Experiential learning enables students to develop the skills they are seeking to enter their chosen professions, become career-prepared and pursue other interests that benefit their local, national and global communities.

More than ever, students are demanding experiential learning opportunities and we are in an excellent position to respond by building upon our current strengths in this area. By developing a strategic and cross-institutional framework for experiential learning, we will deliver a more consistent and high-value experience for students and community partners alike, streamline administrative work and grow the number of opportunities available to students. To ensure equitable access to experiential learning opportunities, we will work to address barriers facing some students, such as financial constraints, scheduling constraints, logistics and competitive entry.

Strategic priority: Expand experiential learning opportunities across all programs to ensure students can connect theory to practice, achieve personal and professional growth, and provide meaningful contributions to their communities.

Supporting initiatives:

- Develop a cross-institutional experiential learning framework that streamlines the delivery, coordination and tracking of experiential learning activities.

- Create more experiential learning opportunities for students on campus, off campus and through community partnerships.

- Improve access to experiential learning opportunities by addressing barriers for students to participate.

Resources and implementation: Developing an experiential learning framework will be a multi-year initiative involving input across academic faculties and departments. Successful implementation will require the alignment of resources to facilitate growth in experiential learning opportunities.

Intercultural competence

Mount Royal strives to foster a community that is grounded in anti-racism and anti-oppression, whereby all members are accountable for upholding principles of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) and contributing to an environment in which everyone feels they belong. We will continue to advance EDI, in part, by cultivating intercultural competence[5] through international and intercultural learning experiences, and by strengthening self-connection and reflexivity as part of the academic experience.

Recognizing a plurality of values across cultures and communities, intercultural competence is the ability to navigate and adapt to diverse contexts by understanding and respecting each other's differences and backgrounds. Developing intercultural competence as part of a Mount Royal education can endow graduates with the awareness and confidence to tackle racism, discrimination, bias, prejudice and all forms of systemic injustice, thus contributing to the vitality of today's diverse local and global society.

Global learning[6] emphasizes the development of intercultural competence and global stewardship through international and intercultural learning experiences. We will explore creative methods to nurture intercultural competence through enhanced global learning experiences in our programs. In addition to broadening international exchanges and field schools, we will offer more local and online learning opportunities that tap into the diversity of our local and global communities.

Strategic priority: Provide more teaching and learning opportunities with international and intercultural components, to uphold and advance principles of equity, diversity and inclusion.

Supporting initiatives:

- Identify and implement ways to incorporate more local, international and online global learning experiences into programs and courses.

- Increase supports for faculty to develop and deliver course content focused on building intercultural competence through global learning and critical self-reflection.

- Provide more immersive intercultural learning opportunities by expanding study abroad, field schools and faculty exchanges.

Resources and implementation: Increasing learning opportunities to build intercultural competence will be ongoing work, led by faculties and academic departments as part of curriculum renewal, program review advancement plans and other work.

Indigenization and decolonization

Through our journey toward Indigenization and decolonization, we will thoughtfully and respectfully incorporate Indigenous perspectives throughout our programs. This includes teachings on Indigenous ways of knowing and the realities of Indigenous peoples, such as the history of colonization and settler colonialism. Ensuring the careful and appropriate inclusion of Indigenous perspectives into our programs will allow Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to learn from one another, helping to create ethical space[7] and counteract the racism, discrimination and oppression that has long impacted the well-being of Indigenous communities.

We will support Indigenous faculty in teaching Indigenous ways of knowing and developing course content that incorporates Indigenous perspectives and realities. We will also provide all faculty with support in the delivery of Indigenous course content, through personal and professional development, guidance, mentorships and more.

Strategic priority: Integrate Indigenous ways of knowing and perspectives into curriculum, applying the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

Supporting initiatives:

- Retain and recruit more Indigenous faculty to teach Indigenous ways of knowing, and support the development and integration of program-focused Indigenous content.

- Develop Indigenous curriculum within degree programs and General Education.

- Increase supports for faculty in the teaching and learning of Indigenous perspectives and realities.

Resources and implementation: Integrating Indigenous ways of knowing and content into curriculum is expected to be ongoing, cross-institutional and collaborative work. We will be guided by members of Indigenous communities, including Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and Indigenous faculty and staff to ensure the careful and meaningful implementation of this strategic priority. The Indigenization and Decolonization Plan will expand on this strategic priority.

Inclusive and accessible programming

Teaching excellence is a hallmark of a Mount Royal education. We are committed to providing students with high-quality programming and an academic experience that is grounded in community, belonging and the rich benefits of an in-person learning environment.

To sustain teaching excellence, we must continually assess our pedagogical practices and the evolving needs of learners. As such, we will enhance supports for faculty in applying new and innovative approaches to curriculum development and delivery, such as Open Education[8], Universal Design for Learning[9] and new educational technologies. This, in turn, will foster a more equitable landscape for students to achieve their academic goals.

In addition, we will respond to students' desire for greater flexibility in how, when and where they learn. We will thoughtfully adjust modes of delivery and course scheduling options to meet students' needs without compromising the sense of connection and community for which we are known.

Strategic priority: Diversify pedagogical practices and course delivery options to enhance the learning experience and support the evolving needs of students.

Supporting initiatives:

- Increase supports for faculty to apply new approaches to curriculum development and delivery, where appropriate, to better meet the diverse learning needs of students.

- Assess and adjust programs to achieve the optimal mix of in-person, online and blended delivery, ensuring a high-quality learning experience whereby students can meaningfully interact with faculty, regardless of course modality.

- Offer more course options during the spring and summer semesters to give students greater flexibility in managing their schedules and accelerating their time to completion.

Resources and implementation: Diversifying pedagogical practices will be ongoing work, led by faculties and supported by academic departments. Resource allocation to support pedagogical practices, including the development of course materials, will be largely determined at the faculty level.

Research and scholarship

Mount Royal fosters a culture of scholarly inquiry for the betterment of the broader community, where undergraduate students have the unique opportunity to participate in faculty research. We take pride in the research and scholarship accomplishments of Mount Royal faculty, Canada Research Chairs and our Institutes. We are also an Ashoka Changemaker Campus, recognized for our commitment to excellence in social innovation education to address local and global challenges.

We aim to grow research and scholarship at Mount Royal by increasing undergraduate student research opportunities, expanding faculty supports and growing funded research. In addition, we will strengthen our community partnerships and connections through more sponsored research, community-based research and participatory action research projects. Through this work, we will promote the economic, cultural and social well-being of our communities, and grow our reputation as a leading undergraduate university.

Strategic priority: Grow research and scholarship to advance knowledge, inform teaching and curriculum, and create stronger connections with the communities we serve.

Supporting initiatives:

- Expand undergraduate student research opportunities to provide greater and more equitable access for students.

- Grow funded research to foster the advancement of knowledge, and inform the teaching and learning experience.

- Build and strengthen research partnerships and knowledge mobilization within the community.

Resources and implementation: Mount Royal's Research and Scholarship Plan will expand on this strategic priority, including implementation and alignment of resources to advance the supporting initiatives.

Driving success

The successful implementation of the Academic Plan is directly tied to the ability of Mount Royal faculty, staff and management to effectively do their work. To ensure we have the necessary **tools, resources and supports**, resource allocation decisions will be made in alignment with the Academic Plan.

- The **well-being of our community** is a top priority and we recognize the impacts that resource limitations can have on people. We will align resources for the successful implementation and sustainment of the initiatives set out in the Academic Plan. For example, we will provide the appropriate **professional development and supports** for faculty and staff to ensure everyone involved can effectively and meaningfully engage in implementation work and activities.

- A **Faculty Complement Strategy** that clarifies how best to grow and diversify the complement needed to achieve our strategic priorities will be developed in alignment with the Academic Plan. This strategy will inform annual complement planning that takes place at the Faculty level.

- We will ensure the appropriate use of and investment in **physical infrastructure** and **technology** (including educational technology) to achieve our strategic priorities, while supporting the well-being of people and maintaining the quality of our programming.

- We will continually work to evaluate and **streamline processes** to create efficiencies and foster a more productive and enjoyable work environment.

- The Academic Plan will guide **resource allocation**. We will work cross-institutionally to improve **budget** processes and provide appropriate resource allocation to support the successful implementation of the plan.

Moving ahead

Implementation

Implementation of the initiatives set out in the Academic Plan requires collaboration across the University. Initiatives will be led by various existing committees or task forces and working groups, whose work will include consulting with key stakeholders, developing strategies and implementation plans, executing on those plans, and reporting on the progress of their work. Implementation will follow institutional governance processes, as appropriate, including those under the oversight of the Board of Governors, General Faculties Council (GFC), Faculty Councils and the appropriate GFC committees.

Measures

The Office of the Provost will work with the Office of Institutional Research and Planning and those involved in leading implementation work to establish measures for each of the academic goals in the University Strategic Plan, and any additional measures specific to the strategic priorities and initiatives set out in the Academic Plan.

Reporting

The Office of the Provost will work with the Office of Institutional Research and Planning to develop an annual reporting process to share our progress toward the academic goals in the University Strategic Plan and the strategic priorities and initiatives in the Academic Plan. A progress report is expected to be presented to GFC on an annual basis, along with implementation and performance updates throughout each academic year.

A living plan

While the Academic Plan sets Mount Royal's strategic academic direction to 2030, we recognize that external factors, such as government funding and societal changes, can positively or negatively affect implementation and progress toward achieving our goals. This plan and its supporting measures will be reviewed on a regular basis, and if necessary, amendments may be made to reflect such changes. Any amendments will be submitted to GFC for discussion and/or approval.

End notes

1. **Liberal education**

    A liberal education is an approach to learning that aims to develop the whole person by fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, effective communication and ethical judgment. It encourages students to explore a wide range of disciplines, including the arts, social sciences, natural and mathematical sciences, and professional programs. A liberal education is focused on cultivating intellectual skills and civic virtues. Since many work-integration opportunities, travel studies, field schools, and experiential learning opportunities broadly aim to foster not only specific skills but broader civic virtues, they are also part of a liberal education.

2. **General Education**

    General Education refers to a set of courses or requirements that are part of an undergraduate curriculum, designed to provide students with foundational knowledge and skills across a variety of disciplines. The purpose of General Education is to ensure that students receive a well-rounded education, regardless of their major, by exposing them to different subjects and perspectives.

3. **Experiential learning**

    Experiential learning provides enriched learning opportunities, inside and outside of the classroom, where students learn through action and reflection. It is often the opportunity to integrate theory and practice. At Mount Royal, experiential learning includes (but is not limited to) field schools, simulation learning, Community Service Learning, course-based research opportunities and work-integrated learning (such as practica, clinical placements, internships, co-operative work programs, work experiences, and community and industry research and projects). Students may also participate in experiential learning connected with Indigenous ways of knowing.

4. **Transversal skills**

    "Transversal skills are those typically considered as not specifically related to a particular job, task, academic discipline or area of knowledge but as skills that can be used in a wide variety of situations and work settings (IBE 2013). These skills are increasingly in high demand for learners to successfully adapt to changes and to lead meaningful and productive lives (UNESCO, 2014)."

    Examples include (but are not limited to): (1) Critical and innovative thinking; (2) Interpersonal skills (e.g., presentation and communication skills, organizational skills, teamwork, etc.); (3) Intrapersonal skills (e.g. self-discipline, enthusiasm, perseverance, self-awareness, etc.); (4) Global citizenship (e.g. openness, respect for diversity, intercultural understanding, etc.); (5) Media and information literacy, such as the ability to locate and access information as well as analyze, evaluate and share information effectively and ethically.

(Source: UNESCO Asia-Pacific. (2014). *Skills for holistic human development* (Education Policy Brief No. 2). https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000245064/PDF/245064eng.pdf.multi)

5. **Intercultural competence**

    "Intercultural competence refers to the ability to deal effectively with cross-cultural contexts, including the identification of relevant cultural differences, predicting misunderstanding due to those differences, and generating appropriate adaptation strategies based on perspective-taking and code-shifting (Bennett, 2010)."

    (Source: Bennett, M. (2010). *Creating an interculturally competent campus to educate global citizens*. Universidad 2010 7th International Congress on Higher Education, Havana, Cuba. https://www.idrinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/creating_ic_campus.pdf)

6. **Global learning**

    "Global learning is a critical analysis of and an engagement with complex, interdependent global systems and legacies (such as natural, physical, social, cultural, economic, and political) and their implications for people's lives and the earth's sustainability. Through global learning, students should 1) become informed, open-minded, and responsible people who are attentive to diversity across the spectrum of differences, 2) seek to understand how their actions affect both local and global communities, and 3) address the world's most pressing and enduring issues collaboratively and equitably (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2014)."

    (Source: Association of American Colleges and Universities. (2014). *Global learning VALUE rubric.* https://www.aacu.org/initiatives/value-initiative/value-rubrics/value-rubrics-global-learning)

7. **Ethical space**

    "[The] idea of the ethical space, produced by contrasting perspectives of the world, entertains the notion of a meeting place, or initial thinking about a neutral zone between entities or cultures. The space offers a venue to step out of our allegiances, to detach from the cages of our mental worlds and assume a position where human-to-human dialogue can occur. The ethical space offers itself as the theatre for cross-cultural conversation in pursuit of ethically engaging diversity and disperses claims to the human order. The dimension of the dialogue might seem overwhelming because it will involve and encompass issues like language, distinct histories, knowledge traditions, values, interests, and social, economic and political realities and how these impact and influence an agreement to interact. Initially, it will require a protracted effort to create a level playing field where notions of universality are replaced by concepts such as the equality of nations (Ermine, 2007)."

    (Source: Ermine, W. (2007). The Ethical Space of Engagement. *Indigenous Law Journal, 6*(11), 202. https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/ilj/article/view/27669/20400)

8. **Open Education**

   Open education (OE) is a movement that aims to make education more accessible, participatory and transparent by incorporating open teaching practices, open-access research and open learning materials. Open educational resources (OER) are openly licensed freely available teaching and learning materials that allow for adaptation, re-use, remixing and sharing. OER may include but are not limited to textbooks, readings, multi-media files, software, assessment tools and entire courses. Incorporating these resources into practice reduces financial and access-related barriers for students.

9. **Universal Design for Learning**

   Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is an educational framework that guides the development of flexible learning environments to accommodate individual learning needs and reduce barriers to learning. UDL offers flexibility in how learners access material, engage with it and demonstrate their knowledge.

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