

OCAD University

Strategic Research Plan  
2019-2024

5 November 2018

OCAD University acknowledges the ancestral and traditional territories of the Mississaugas of the New Credit, the Haudenosaunee, the Anishinaabe and the Huron-Wendat, who are the original owners and custodians of the land on which we live, work and create.

OCAD University challenges you to audaciously and responsibly pursue the questions of our time through the powerful interplay of art, design, the social sciences, humanities, and the sciences. - OCAD University Vision Statement

## Introduction

Building on over 140 years of internationally recognized art and design education, professional practice in art, design and new media, innovative research, and engaged scholarship, this Strategic Research Plan (SRP) speaks directly to OCAD University's new and ambitious Academic Plan – *OCAD University: Transforming Student Experience, 2017-2022* which re-affirms the central role of knowledge creation and research across the institution. Identified as a key priority over the next five years, the plan establishes 11 ambitious goals for research activity at the university aimed at increasing research capacity, exploring innovative interdisciplinary research programs, and developing and publicizing an inclusive understanding of what constitutes research and scholarship at OCAD University. This Strategic Research Plan provides a direction for how we will achieve these goals over the next five years.

While no single document could describe in full the breadth and diversity of creative activity, research, scholarship and innovation produced by OCAD University faculty, students and staff, this Strategic Research Plan highlights some of our areas of research strength and describes what makes research at OCAD University unique. The plan identifies opportunities for strategic development and growth of research and research training, highlighting those areas of research in which the university intends to deploy Canada Research Chairs and/or research infrastructure support, identifies planned inter-institutional and inter-sectoral collaborations, and identifies how we will assess our success in meeting the objectives established by the plan.

## Context

OCAD University's Academic Plan, 2017-22 outlines our commitment to decolonization, diversity, equity and inclusion. Our focus on decolonization and indigenous ways of knowing underlie our Strategic Research Plan and our commitment to the principle of "nothing about us without us." As outlined in our Academic Plan:

'Nothing about us without us,' is a term that suggests no policy should be designed without full and direct participation of the members of any group affected by the policy. Its origins lie in central Europe, and in particular 1505 Poland and the legislation that transferred power from the monarchy to parliament at that time. The first English use of the term came through disability activism in the 1990's, and it has recently been taken up by Mi'kmaq scholar Marie Battiste among others to stress the need for inclusion within governance structures and all activities and decision-making involving Indigenous peoples. (p. 19)

We recognize that there are colonial structures inherent in some research practices, and that research practices themselves have been used as instruments of colonization. We also recognize that, in decolonizing the academic enterprise, we have the opportunity to reimagine research practices in ways that are meaningful to Art, Design and Media and the principles of decolonization and inclusiveness. We recognize that the active conversations inherent in research across disciplines requires us to rethink our relationship to ancient knowledges, global indigenous and customary knowledges, and the world views

inherent in a global, multicultural world. The research enterprise benefits from these contexts as we expand our definition of research to account for indigenous methodologies and indeed new and emergent disciplines. Within this research context, terms such as innovation and entrepreneurship can be rendered more inclusive.

## Research at OCAD University

OCAD University leads in defining research in art, design and media practice, scholarship, and teaching and learning, as reflected in the myriad disciplines that comprise our academic community. Over the past decade, we have built on the history of studio art and design to establish significant leadership in art, design and media scholarship, research and research-creation as a recognized source of knowledge production. The research, scholarship, art and knowledge produced at OCAD University are informed by and impacts disciplines and creative and professional practice in art, design, the social sciences, humanities, and science and technology. There are many research activities conducted that produce novel outputs and outcomes that are particular to the art, design and media contexts in which we work.

OCAD University faculty have autonomy to pursue their research interests within the framework of academic freedom, while respecting the principles of community engagement and “nothing about us without us” as articulated above. Engagement with indigenous communities in particular recognizes and respects the sovereignty of these communities, and accounts for the protocols and processes and necessity of including all people who are engaged in research in the research processes themselves. This is one way that we can help the research communities in which we practice to continue to evolve research practices in ways that distance themselves from colonial or repressive past practice.

OCAD University faculty, students and staff are leaders in interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary forms of research. They contribute new thinking and practices, often engaging emerging technologies and hands-on, community-based points of focus. They lead internationally recognized research initiatives in inclusive design, design for health, art and environment, art as social change, visualization and design engineering, sustainability and environmental design, digital media, Indigenous visual culture, as well as research into teaching and learning, in both a studio and classroom context. Their approaches foreground collaboration, community-based engagement, Indigenous cultures and intergenerational knowledge transfer. Their work exemplifies inclusively designed research that makes new knowledge accessible to diverse stakeholders and communities.

Since the 1970s OCAD University has been a recognized leader in art and technology. Over the past two decades this capacity has grown through research in digital media, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), design and creative technology. OCAD University’s world-leading capacities in inclusive design, growth in visual analytics and other fields brings together a human-centric integration of artificial intelligence, machine learning, smart textiles and other forms of emerging technology.

OCAD University is committed to providing research training opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students. Students from all levels participate in research activities, thereby gaining knowledge of research methodologies, including ideas and techniques for critical inquiry and problem-solving. Students participating in research activities learn, acquire and put into practice skills and competencies from many disciplines. These experiences ensure our graduates are engaged citizens of the world, and

can realize meaningful careers by putting into practice the skills and competencies of art, design and media research and research-creation.

## Research Priorities and Excellence Across the Institution

OCAD University will continue leadership in art, design and media innovation and research through the following six inter-connected themes:

*Creative action for social change:* Art and design research at OCAD University values different voices and forms of agency. Key to the process of decolonization is a shared commitment to support and centre diverse and marginalized—new, ancient, and customary—knowledges and perspectives. Recognizing the potential for transformation through arts and culture in society and community, OCAD U researchers employ a broad array of socially engaged approaches and methodologies in their work. This theme encompasses research initiatives in art for social change, social innovation, digital inclusion, strategic foresight, and human-centred design. Drawn together, this work shares a primary concern with social justice, activism, health, resiliency, advocacy, and citizenship.

*Relational approaches to place, space, and time:* Faculty members and students at OCAD University are shedding new light on our relationships to both natural and built environments, our impact on these places, and ways of living with the land. Revisioning these relationships is a key avenue to realizing reconciliation. Faculty research encompasses areas of inquiry as diverse as Indigenous knowledge, public art and design, environmental sustainability, biomimicry, urban ecology, and immersive environments. Employing a variety of approaches, OCAD U researchers are developing land-based and human-centred solutions to solve complex challenges and address issues of migration, climate change, homelessness, accessibility, student housing, public transportation, and preservation of historical space.

*Critical mediations and cultural inquiries:* Adopting inter- and transdisciplinary perspectives to local and global inquiries into visual culture, humanities, technology, science and social sciences, researchers at OCAD University critique academic norms and cultural institutions to enact decolonized, equitable, and sustainable approaches to research and its educational outcomes. Cultural historians, critical theorists, curators, creative practitioners and knowledge keepers challenge and rework the ways we understand and share knowledge, whether in the form of Indigenous knowledge and forms of learning, traditional scholarship, old and new media, or cultural objects and practices. As the largest Art and Design University in Canada and among the largest and oldest specialized art and design educational institutions in the world, OCAD University has great potential to grow its reputation as a crucible for research-creation and practice-based research methods that mediate between cultures and disciplines.

*Making knowledge through material, form and practice:* OCAD University fosters new forms of materiality that offer a distinctive understanding of the world around us through the exploration of materials, forms, and creative practice. Faculty members embrace both traditional forms and fabrication practices while also engaging with digitally-enabled art and design practices, processes, and products. The studio environment provides a space of creation that becomes a site of critical inquiry, where the relationships between the makers and forms themselves enable new knowledge to emerge, and offer a chance to implicate communities and cultural

contexts. Distinct from and building on anthropological or archaeological studies of material, research under this theme engages materials and forms in relation to creative concepts, aesthetics, embodied actions, and the social, historical and political implications of mediums.

*Design thinking, Indigenous knowledges, inclusive design, strategic foresight and innovation:*

Collaborative and ethical problem-based approaches to teaching, learning and research are vital to how we understand our present and future environments, both built and imagined. OCAD University designers, visual and media artists, and strategic thinkers engage communities from across a spectrum of social locations and cultural sectors to investigate and activate innovative solutions to key problems in health care, information and communication technologies (ICT), city planning, organizational development, education, media, and commercial ventures. OCAD U researchers working in inclusive design, environmental design, visual analytics and design for health employ Design Thinking methodologies and human centred design principles to promote deep understanding of real needs and develop innovative solutions that are desirable, effective, and viable.

*Art, Design, Science and Technology:* OCAD University integrates art and design with engineering, science, and health research, building capacity to think and work creatively. Our researchers are advancing the forefront of technologies across interconnected future domains such as the internet of things, mixed reality and user interfaces, acknowledging the socio-technical complexities of today's human-computer society and the innovative, transformative, and disruptive impact that comes with new forms of media. OCAD University has taken the opportunity to expand unique perspectives in research supporting and engaging the interdisciplinary perspectives of Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Math and Design (STEAMD). This focus is reflected in our Strategic Mandate Agreement 2017-20.

## Strategic Research Directions: Creative Practice, Collaboration, Innovation

OCAD U is committed to expanding and refining the university's research culture, while increasing partnerships and opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students to explore and apply new knowledge and practices. - OCAD University Strategic Mandate Agreement

As an established voice in creative-practice research and innovation, OCAD University is committed to supporting faculty, graduate students, and staff as they continue to interrogate the boundaries between other forms of disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge production and the specialized approaches of artists, designers and scholars. Adept at working with external stakeholders, corporate partners, foundations, and other funding agencies, OCAD University recognizes that the development of strategic collaborations across sectors will enhance our capacity for research and our reputation within the academic and other communities.

*Creating, Knowing, Sharing:* Guided by principles of inclusivity and diversity, OCAD University research policies and protocols seek to engage a broad range of practices, participants, and forms of knowledge creation. Central to these principles is a commitment to recognizing the long history of Indigenous resistance and resilience and responding to Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action.

*Creative Practice as Knowledge Creation:* The terms 'practice-based research,' 'practice-led research,' and 'research-creation' are commonly used in relation to work within and around creative practice. We understand research-creation to encompass the plurality of practice-based research, advancing the creative outputs that arise from studio research. Research-creation engages visual, tactile, material, bodily, experiential, affective, and sensory ways of knowing, leading to forms of output that diverge from and complement traditional publication media. We conduct research and scholarship on research-creation activities and outputs as a way of producing new knowledge and applying what is learned into new community contexts. This includes the application of information technologies and online forms of knowledge generation, modelling, and dissemination.

*Cross-disciplinary collaborations:* Art and design in their truest forms are created to fracture boundaries and initiate dialogue with individuals, internally and externally. Discursive spaces and events within OCAD University create opportunities for participants to affect existing narratives and to create meaningful reflection within and across disciplines. OCAD University further enhances its role as a hub for knowledge mobilization. The diversity of our faculty and our differentiation as an art and design university puts us in a unique position to promote innovative approaches to research and scholarship.

*Innovation partnerships:* Partnerships with communities, community organizations (including not-for-profit), scholars, health-care researchers and practitioners, members of the private sector, are essential to research at OCAD University. These partnerships help fuel experiential learning and professional practice; they help the development and enhancement of research culture at OCAD University by exposing us to novel ideas, practices, challenges and opportunities to learn and apply new knowledge and practices. We will establish collaborative relationships with other universities in Canada and abroad, for the development and application of new knowledge. We will promote and foster the university as a place for public and private sector partners to engage and invest in research.

## Canada Research Chairs and CFI Infrastructure Plans

OCAD University currently has an allocation of three Canada Research Chairs (CRCs). Drawn from our areas of research strength and identified priorities for strategic development, funding from the Chairs has been used to attract and retain researchers in the areas of:

- Dr Gerald McMaster, Canada Research Chair (Tier 1) Indigenous Visual Culture and Curatorial Practice
  - Dr McMaster's transnational research program links Canada with colleagues in other parts of the world and is concerned with critical concepts such as identity and subjectivity, indigeneity, cultural stereotyping and voice. Several key questions guides his investigations: How does art from one culture influence and inspire art in another? How can curatorial practices associated with indigenous visual culture support new insights and expression? What is the impact of globalization on the production of indigenous art and its reception by non-indigenous societies near and far? What are the effects of new technologies on the development of new art forms?
- Dr Kate Sellen, Canada Research Chair (Tier 2) Design for Health

- Dr Kate Sellen’s work focuses on areas of health that involve significant challenges regarding the effective design of tools to support dynamic, often critical, experiences and work practices. “Temporal and Dynamic Design in Health” or TEMPO, aims to develop, and refine through practice based research and research creation, a conceptual framework for use in design with a focus on dynamics and temporality.
- Dr Alexis Morris, Canada Research Chair (Tier 2) The Internet of Things
  - The CRC in the internet of things aims to advance OCAD University's research leadership in technologies for designing human-centered ubiquitous computing environments with innovative approaches to how to streamline the relationship between context-aware adaptive environments, and the humans-in-the-loop of such systems. In this role, the CRC will develop research applications and explorations on wide-ranging adaptive system designs, across varied disciplines and industries.

OCAD University has enacted hiring practices to ensure that we address issues of equity and diversity among Canada Research Chairs. We will continue this practice for future CRC allocations.

Canada Foundation for Innovation support for major projects has included:

- Inclusive Design Institute (IDI): IDI infrastructure is deployed to support inclusive design research across the institution and our partners.

Future CRC allocations and CFI funding will be used to continue to build our research lab and studio infrastructure based on the priorities articulated in this document. The University is committed to supporting equitable access to research labs, studios, infrastructure and support.

## Measuring Our Success

As a unique, differentiated art and design institution, we recognize the need to encourage activity that is unique and distinct, not easily measured through traditional research performance indicators. Our Strategic Mandate Agreement outlines our commitment to measurement of research success:

OCAD University has embarked on a process to define research activities germane to art and design. This effort has resulted in the development of a framework that provides the university with a way to measure the activities, outputs and impact of research and research-related creation outside traditional measures (e.g., patents, publications, citations), thereby addressing the limitations of these measures. The university is now building on this work to further consolidate the output and impact measures and to incorporate these within our reporting frameworks. This work is important because social and economic productivity demands a focus on design thinking, and the contributions of research in design and art need to be accounted for in order to maximize their impact.

Our framework defines what constitutes research at OCAD University, and what emerges as a result of the diverse activity that constitutes research across our faculties. This measurement will continue to be refined as we define our research approaches, methods, activities and outcomes, the participation of undergraduate and graduate students and faculty from across the disciplines engaged in research, our research capacity and support infrastructure, and the resulting impact in our communities.



Foundational to our operation as a publicly-funded research institution, we have a commitment and accountability to the communities we support and serve to tell the stories that emerge from our research activities. The research enterprise is not complete unless and until we are able to engage our publics in the outputs and outcomes of the work we do. This acknowledges the effort required to engage in knowledge transfer and mobilization activities and in the measurement of success. In keeping with our commitment to decolonization we recognize that there are additional efforts required to ensure community engagement, and that our indigenous colleagues assume additional effort so as to ensure representation o committees, in policies and procedures, and in the documents and artefacts that are produced as a result of research at OCAD University. This is in keeping iwht our approaches to reconciliation, accountability, and ethical frameworks, which includes our commitment to challenging and securing spaces and resources for indigenous and marginalized faculty.

This Strategic Research Plan will track this progress year over year, including the continual refinement of research and its many impacts. Our approach is sensitive to the context in which we live and work, and is flexible and sensitive to the uniqueness of OCAD University research, allowing for changes in direction and context.

### Institutional Planning and Approval Process

This Strategic Research Plan was written in consultation with a broad cross-section of the OCAD University community and developed under the leadership of the Research Committee, chaired by the Vice-President of Research & Innovation, with the aim of embedding these principles throughout the process.