Mount Saint Vincent University

Canada Research Chairs Program
Strategic Research Plan

SUMMARY

Our Mission

Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU) is the only university in Canada dedicated to the education of women. The University is committed to the promotion of academic excellence through the provision of a strong core of liberal arts, sciences, and professional disciplines; maximum accessibility to education; and the advancement and dissemination of knowledge through teaching, research, and scholarly activity.

The Planning Process

The University's strategic plan, *Blueprint 2000*, has been approved by both Senate and the Board of Governors. Our vision is to become a world leader in innovative education for women, and research and research training have a prominent place in helping us to strive for that vision. Using *Blueprint 2000* as its context, the Strategic Research Plan was drafted in consultation with academic departments, the Senate Committee on Research and Publications, and the Committee on Academic Policy and Planning. This Strategic Research Plan, endorsed by Senate, is focused on the 21st Century Research Chairs Program and its goals.

Objectives

The major objectives of the MSVU Strategic Research Plan are to:

- Build on existing strengths to conduct high quality, distinctive research;
- Recruit and retain outstanding faculty who will lead research activities in our strategic theme areas: Gender, Human Development, and Technology Enhanced Learning;
- Support and create research programs that have maximal influence on furthering faculty expertise and the strategic directions of *Blueprint 2000*;
- Promote an environment in which undergraduate and graduate students are mentored and exposed to excellence in research;
- Develop research programs that advance the university in its community outreach and that build the national and international reputation of MSVU.

Major Areas for Research and Research Training

To guide our deployment of the 21st Century Research Chairs, we have identified three broad clusters of research endeavour. Two of these, *Gender* and *Human Development*, represent areas of established and mature, yet further evolving, research excellence at MSVU. The third, *Technology Enhanced Learning*, is an area of established practical expertise with enormous potential for research development. Each cluster represents a number of separate areas, each supported by groups of faculty members.

Gender

Explicitly, MSVU promotes research on women and related issues of gender and equity, although research is not restricted to these areas. There is substantial critical research mass across the faculty on issues of gender, and this includes representation across almost all departments at MSVU. The *Gender* cluster is a composite of a number of areas, both theoretical and applied:
- feminist inquiry;
- literary traditions: contemporary feminist literature, feminist criticism and theory, queer theory;
- history and peace and conflict studies: feminist pacifism, women's history, human rights;
- sexualities: theories of sexuality, masculinity and schooling, relationship to health care;
- cultural studies;
- women and work: caregiving, eldercare, unpaid labour, social and economic equity, union activism;
- women and religion;
- women and technology;
- women and entrepreneurship;
- women and management;
- women and science;
- women in development: international projects (enhancement of quality of life for women and girls via capacity building).

The placement of a Chair in the *Gender* cluster will allow us to further develop our formidable expertise by expanding one or more of the areas outlined above. Because gender is such an overarching organizing feature of our research profile, we expect the Chair to conduct research that will lead to linkages between and across varying disciplines and research that can reconfigure relationships in an innovative way.

Human Development

We have significant research activity and expertise across many departments in the study of human development. Among these are the Departments of Applied Human Nutrition, Biology, Chemistry, Child and Youth Study, Education, Family Studies and Gerontology, Mathematics (including Statistics), Psychology, and Sociology/Anthropology. Our human development research is broadly defined and incorporates research across the life course and through a broad diversity of social, personal and bio-chemical research foci. Our faculty members study basic developmental processes (perception, language, cognition, evolution, ecosystems, and biochemistry), applied research problems (learning, literacy, caregiving), and services that support development across the life course (long-term care, support for disabilities, family support, community-based services, health and social policy). A strength of MSVU's applied research in this area features an extensive involvement in partnerships with external institutions and agencies, the community and government, and thus includes important outreach and professional development components.

Of particular note are strengths in the areas of child/family development and care, aging and interdisciplinarity. Although not mutually exclusive, our research into these areas has been longstanding, involving inter-sectoral collaboration that is regional and national in scope and consistently supported by external agencies. This research has had a significant impact on policy development and analysis, as well as in the formation of highly qualified personnel through research-referenced and engaged education.

MSVU researchers in the cluster of *Human Development* are engaged in research in key strategic areas. The children's agenda, population aging, care for the elderly, health

care, and family policy are high priority government issues at the moment and are likely to remain so. MSVU has the research expertise to take advantage of large, ongoing funding initiatives, which are an excellent fit with our mission and our existing research strengths in this cluster.

MSVU science research foci intersect and resonate particularly with the human development cluster. Current research activity expresses, broadly, interest in ecological and environmental phenomenon that, for example, range from insects and plants, through the bio-chemical processes associated with diseases of aging and statistical analyses of commercial tree growth factors, to the evolution and development of the skeleton. MSVU science research also features a strong expression of interdisciplinarity. Furthermore, MSVU is committed to fostering excellence in science research that intersects mentoring with commitment to engaging students in research-referenced learning.

In the *Human Development* cluster, Chairs may be deployed in the areas such as Child/Family Development, Care and Aging, and Interdisciplinary Science.

Technology Enhanced Learning

Our excellence in technology enhanced learning comes from employing delivery methods which are among the most innovative in the country. These include 20 years of television broadcasts in the greater Halifax and Atlantic regions, and the recent innovation of Canada-wide broadcasts through the CRTC-approved Canadian Learning Television. The Department of Distance Learning and Continuing Education delivers programs through a flexible multi-mode approach, which includes tailored combinations of online, print, teleconferencing, and seminars. Complementing the teaching component, faculty members in the Faculty of Education are engaged in research on critical pedagogy, learning processes, and literacy.

Modes of delivery, which help to ensure optimum access to academic courses and programs and which support new teaching and learning paradigms, have distinct implications for research about learning and about the impact of distance education. We plan to develop research capacity in this cluster by building on existing faculty strengths and increasing the number of faculty conducting research on this topic. The Chair in this area has the opportunity to play a leading role in the creation of a broader research agenda to guide the cross-disciplinary research program we plan to develop. Deployment of a Chair ensures that we maximize our existing strengths and interests and match our leading role in technology-enhanced learning practice with an equally strong role in research.

Chairs Distribution

When the strategic research plan was first articulated it was determined that Tier II chairs would be appointed in each of the three strategic theme areas: Gender, Human Development and Technology Enhanced Learning. One position in Human Development (Care and Aging) has been filled at the Tier II level and a Tier I Chair in Technology Enhanced Learning was filled as of July 1, 2005. Tier II Chairs in Gender and Human Development were recently announced and will be taken up on July 1, 2007. Consistent with the University's desire to attract and retain the best possible scholars, it wishes to have the flexibility to determine the tier level of future appointment opportunities, thereby fostering the likelihood of filling the Chair with a first-class scholar. Hence, the tier level for the future Chairs will be determined based on this principle, within the flexibility allowed by the CRC program.

Monitoring Gender Representation

As of January 2007, MSVU has appointed four women to Canada Research Chair positions. The University has not had a challenge in attracting women applicants to the Canada Research Chairs positions advertised (e.g. 67% of applications received in three previous competitions have been from women). The profile of current full-time faculty (65% women) indicates that the University has attracted a high proportion of women to faculty positions. It is our expectation that our remaining Canada Research Chair positions will attract both qualified female and male applicants.

The Research Context

The University has dedicated resources to support its research climate. The Research Office, created over three decades ago to support and encourage faculty research and to facilitate international activities, is staffed with a full-time Associate Vice-President (Research), who is released of teaching duties, a Project Officer, and Administrative Assistant. In addition to the monies provided through the SSHRC General Research Grant and the Aid to Small Universities funds, the University supports faculty research directly through financial assistance for internal grants. MSVU established an Internal Release Time Award competition in which six awards are granted competitively to faculty every year. Furthermore, MSVU has committed resources to match the SSHRC Release Time Stipends and other externally funded course relief buy-out opportunities (for a half credit course per grantee per year).

The research context is also supported by a variety of centres and facilities that make the University unique. Examples of these are the Catherine Wallace Centre for Women in Science, Institute for the Study of Women, Nova Scotia Centre on Aging (NSCA), Child Study Centre, Centre for Women in Business, and the Art Gallery.

Measuring Success

The criteria for measuring the success of our Research Chairs will evolve with their staggered arrival over time and must be sensitive to their different fields of endeavour. Still, given the nature of the program and the likely profile of the candidates, we expect that all of our Research Chairs will meet the usual measures: success in competitively-funded research and the dissemination of results through peer-reviewed publication or other appropriate means. It will be important for Research Chairs to make an original contribution to MSVU's local, regional, national, and international research profiles.

It should also be clear from the three clusters of research interests specified, *Gender, Human Development,* and *Technology Enhanced Learning*, that we intend our Research Chairs to act as catalysts within the MSVU community. Successful placement of our Chairs should:

- inspire collaborative productivity and research among current faculty;
- enhance recruitment and retention of outstanding faculty in the core research areas;
- attract post-doctoral scholars and foster cross-institutional collaborations;
- foster interdisciplinarity;
- promote the growth of our graduate programs;
- attract undergraduate students whom we train through to honours degrees in preparation for further scholarship.

Once the Research Chairs are in place, other specific evaluative measures may be generated that are customized to the different areas.