

# Progress Review on the MacPherson Institute/Teaching and Learning at McMaster University October 13 and 14, 2022

## Review team

Dr. Simon Bates, Vice-Provost and Associate Vice-President, Teaching & Learning,  
University of British Columbia

Dr. Lynn Taylor, Former Vice-Provost Teaching & Learning, University of Calgary

Dr. Pamela Swett, Dean, Faculty of Humanities, McMaster University

## Executive Summary

Overall, it was clear from the written materials provided in advance, and confirmed during the many excellent, wide-ranging and open discussions during the visit, that the MacPherson Institute (MI) has invested a huge effort to respond, in ways appropriate to its institutional culture, to the recommendations of the 2018 external review. Significant and impactful changes have already been implemented and additional initiatives are works-in-progress. Intentional, systematic assessment has been an integral part of these change processes, and early evidence indicates these efforts are having positive impacts. This evidence is informing ongoing work.

The response of the MacPherson Institute and the University to the 2018 review recommendations has been carefully thought out and, consequently, has already had a strong impact within the MI and across the University community more broadly. Although the change process the MI has undertaken is complex and will continue to evolve, the experiences described across the diverse groups consulted during the site visit indicate that a significant amount of change has taken place. These changes are not trivial.

There has been a palpable shift in the work environment and organizational structure of the MI. The approach to providing teaching and learning support to participating Faculties has been shifted to a Faculty Liaison model, and is already flourishing. It was noteworthy that each major area of renewed programming – professional development for individual teachers, academic partnerships, curriculum development (including IQAP), digital pedagogies, and research on teaching and learning – were recognized by multiple participants as valuable. At the same time, the role of the MI as a trusted partner to other units and to the newly appointed Vice-Provost, Teaching and Learning (VPTL) is being established. These developments have required strong

leadership and hard work on the parts of everyone at the MI and the many colleagues who have supported their change processes. This outcome is all the more remarkable given that a good part of this work took place during the pandemic.

There is still work to be done, and the changes facing postsecondary education will likely ensure that this will always be the case. The relationships, ways of working, and spirit of collaboration that have been forged over the last several years will serve the MacPherson Institute and McMaster University well as you continue to support the development of individual learners and teachers, programs, and the teaching culture of your institution. The review team has put forward the following considerations/recommendations.

- The VPTL and the MI Director should prioritize the articulation of the scope of their roles in a way that recognizes both differentiation and synergies between these two essential leadership roles.
- The VPTL should reassess the role of the Teaching and Learning Advisory Committee, particularly in relation to other committees and working groups that are advancing teaching and learning at McMaster.
- The development of Partnered in Teaching and Learning: McMaster's Teaching and Learning Strategy 2021-2026 has been completed, and it is clear that the MI has been part of this process. A key next step will be to devise and prioritize implementation actions, identifying key contributors and their roles, and articulating what constitutes success.
- Consider convening a 'roundtable' of partners from non-academic units who support teaching and learning activities as a mechanism to share knowledge, enable reciprocal support, and foster a cohesive distributed partnership network to support teaching and learning at McMaster.
- Leverage the foundational work conducted by the MI, in partnership with a network of colleagues engaged in teaching and learning scholarship, to inform institutional discussions of how research on teaching and learning is integrated in career advancement policies, procedures and practices across the University.
- With respect to communication there are three areas for consideration. First, the volume and digestibility of some MI communications could be reconsidered. Perhaps there is an opportunity to engage Faculty Liaisons to play a curative role in targeting MI communications to individual Faculties and groups. Second, there is an opportunity for more discussion between the VPTL and the Deans as plans for priorities and initiatives are in development – particularly those with resource implications. Third, and related to articulating the roles of the recently formed office of the VPTL and the MI, there is a need for on-going attention to coordinating communications between the office of the VPTL and the MI.
- There is a need to articulate how the multiple institutional strategic plans, initiatives and priorities around teaching and learning relate to each other, and to identify the priority areas for focus across all of these plans. Perhaps something as simple as a

graphic representation that makes connections and proximities visible would help 'connect the dots' for the McMaster community.

- Understanding where the MI is leading an initiative, where it is partnering with other units and influencing the direction of an initiative, and where they are supporting initiatives led by others will clarify expectations, improve efficiencies and reduce the chance of friction between groups and individuals who are not clear as to their role in a given project.