School of Graduate Studies

STRATEGIC PLAN **2025-2030**

Brighter World

McMaster University

Land Acknowledgement

McMaster University recognizes and acknowledges that it is located on the traditional territories of the Mississauga and Haudenosaunee nations, and within the lands protected by the “Dish with One Spoon” wampum agreement.

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Welcome

Graduate students and postdoctoral fellows are central to our mission as a world-class higher-educational institution. They innovate, develop and pioneer groundbreaking research that has impact in our local, national and international communities. They are actively engaged in our teaching and pedagogical innovations providing support to learners at all levels. They form a key part of our vibrant McMaster community, bringing their diverse perspectives to their research and studies thus making McMaster a rich, inclusive and diverse place to grow. Ensuring that our graduate students and postdoctoral fellows have the highest quality research and professional training environments and experiences is essential not only to their success, but to ours as an institution.

It with great excitement and pride that I share the 2025-2030 School of Graduate Studies (SGS) strategic plan with the McMaster community. This plan will serve as a guide for the development of essential services (both administrative and academic), experiences and environments for our graduate students and postdoctoral fellows. This plan will guide the development of initiatives, some of which will be developed and led by SGS, and others that will be delivered through a partnership of SGS with Faculties, programs and other central support units. As you read the updated mission, mandate and vision for SGS, I am confident you will see the clear emphasis on our "graduate community of learning" as central to all of our work.

This SGS strategic plan was developed as a collaboration with stakeholders across McMaster. Through strategy sessions, discussions and presentations, a wide array of diverse perspectives were incorporated into this final plan. We engaged and drew input from staff members both inside SGS as well as in programs, faculty members, academic leaders, administrators, student service providers, central support units, community voices from Indigenous and other communities and directly from our graduate students and postdoctoral fellows. The creation of this SGS strategic plan has truly been a team effort! Thank you to all members of our community who have generously given of their time to engage in this strategic visioning process in the development of this plan.

I am confident that this SGS strategic plan positions McMaster to continue our long tradition of excellence as a place to learn, grow and innovate for our graduate students and postdoctoral fellows. I am excited to keep you informed on our progress and by the amazing opportunities that await.

Dr. Steve Hranilovic
Vice-Provost & Dean of Graduate Studies

Mission

The School of Graduate Studies supports the excellence of academic programs and the success of graduate students and postdoctoral fellows through all phases of their academic, professional and personal journey.

Mandate

To achieve the mission, the School of Graduate Studies will:

1. **Deliver** operational excellence for all administrative areas of the graduate and postdoctoral fellow journey from recruitment to alumni engagement.

2. **Collaborate and partner** with faculties and central units across McMaster to share and adopt best practices, ensure a consistent learner experience, and build efficiencies across the university for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows.

3. **Explore, promote and facilitate** the adoption of innovative graduate and postdoctoral supports, multi-disciplinary program development, and novel pedagogies.

4. **Lead** pan-university initiatives to support graduate student and postdoctoral fellows to successfully navigate the university environment, develop durable lifelong skills that are important across disciplines, build a sense of community and belonging across McMaster, and support staff and faculty involved in graduate education.

Our Core Values

Service Culture:
At our heart, SGS is a service unit devoted to the delivery of timely and efficient support directly to graduate students and postdoctoral fellows, graduate supervisors, administrators and academic programs.

Academic and Research Excellence:
Recognizing the central role of graduate students and postdoctoral fellows in contributing to the research and academic excellence of McMaster, SGS supports strong and holistic learning environments and programming across the institution.

Innovation and Learning:
Core to SGS is the continual innovation and evolution of approaches to graduate education and research training whether it is in program development, graduate supervision practices, research mentorship or in learning experiences for professional and personal growth.

Community of Belonging, Inclusivity and Accessibility:
Our graduate community is strong and vibrant since we celebrate our diversity and support Indigenous reconciliation. SGS is committed to fostering inclusive and accessible communities, be they academic, training or administrative, to foster our continued collective growth and success.

Indigenous Reconciliation and EDIA

Indigenous Reconciliation (IR) and equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility (EDIA) are core values of the School of Graduate Studies and are foundational to its strategic mission. These values underpin all of our work.

Indigenous Reconciliation: graduate studies committed to reconciliation

Graduate Studies acknowledges its responsibilities in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and actively engages with Indigenous students, faculty, and staff. This engagement is grounded in principles of respect, reciprocity, and trust. We acknowledge the traditional territories on which our school is situated, and the contributions of Indigenous scholars and community members.

Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility: included in all aspects of academic, professional and personal development

Graduate Studies advances inclusive excellence through partnerships and processes that advance equity, diversity, and accessibility in graduate education. Our recruitment, admissions, retention, and student experience activities are informed by an EDIA lens.

Timeline

Jan 2024

Planning

Strategy process design and planning

Jan-May 2024

Exploration

Strategy Consultation

- McMaster School of Graduate Studies: total of 16 participants (leadership team and staff)
- McMaster University Community: total of 49 participants in interviews and focus groups (University leadership, students, faculty, staff and steering committee)

Themed reports developed. Project team reviewed data collected, created strategic driver themes and priorities in alignment with other key strategic plans across McMaster.

June 2024 - April 2025

Development

Strategic themes and priorities reviewed, tested, and validated with the McMaster University Leadership, School of Graduate Studies and Steering Committee.

Strategy Development: Developed mandate, vision and strategic objectives.

May - Sept 2025

Launch

Strategic Operating Plan: Developed 1-year strategy operating plan.

Launched Strategic Plan

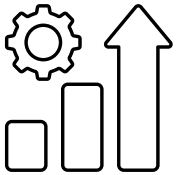
Implement 2025-2026 Strategic Operating Plan

Vision

The School of Graduate Studies guides, facilitates and nurtures world-class academic and research environments as well as holistic student experiences for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows across McMaster.

Strategic Drivers Overview

1



Operational Excellence

The School of Graduate Studies is the central administrative home for all existing graduate programs, newly developing graduate programming and postdoctoral research training. Providing streamlined, efficient and timely service to graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, administrators and academic partners within the graduate community is core to the mission of SGS.

2

Holistic Student and Postdoctoral Experiences

Success for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows depends equally on academics and training as it does on professional and personal development. The School of Graduate Studies is committed to collaborating and coordinating across the institution to ensure that a rich set of holistic experiences are available and to ensure strong connectivity and community between graduate students, postdocs and their academic and administrative units.

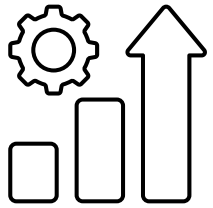
3

World-Class Academic and Research Environments

World-class learning, training and research can only occur in world-class learning environments. The School of Graduate Studies is devoted to guiding and nourishing novel and innovative graduate educational programming including approaches to graduate supervision and mentorship in research training through a vibrant community of learning.

1

Strategic Driver 1: Operational Excellence



Leaders in Operational Efficiencies

- Enhance technology platforms and streamline processes to realize operational efficiencies and improve student experience.
- Streamline to realize efficient and accessible SGS operations.
- Develop and implement a system to collect and leverage data for continuous improvement in support of graduate and postdoctoral education.

Recruitment and Alumni Engagement

- Support in the recruitment process for both domestic and international students.
- Support in building strong connections with alumni to build a long-term connection to McMaster.

Strategic Communications

- Develop and implement an internal and external communication strategy to increase community engagement, enhance SGS/university brand.

Faculty and Unit Partnerships

- Coordinate and leverage efficiencies across faculties and units in the delivery of graduate and postdoctoral services, supports and programming.

2

Strategic Driver 2:
Holistic Student and Postdoctoral Experiences

McMaster Graduate Education Culture

- Foster a thriving and connected culture within SGS and across McMaster academic and administrative units that values and builds understanding of the unique needs of graduate students and postdoctoral fellows.

Durable, Lifelong Skills Development for Graduate Students and Postdoctoral Fellows

- Coordinate programming for the development of durable, lifelong skills including leadership, entrepreneurship, effective communications and collaboration, career advisement and readiness, co-op, mental health and well-being to ensure the future readiness of graduate students and postdoctoral fellows.

Community Building and Belonging

- Partner across McMaster to build a sense of inclusive community across programs for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows.

Graduate Student and Postdoctoral Fellow Guidance and Retention

- Provide proactive advisement, guidance, and support in navigating services, supports, policies, procedures and resources across McMaster.

3

Strategic Driver 3:
World-Class Academic and Research Environments

Community of Learning

- Identify and share learning environment best practices across McMaster to continually advance graduate education.
- Identify and share innovations beyond McMaster to impact the graduate student and postdoctoral fellow learning environment.

Excellence in Graduate Supervision and Mentorship

- Develop and implement training and resources for supervisors, staff and administrators to ensure excellence in graduate education.

Program Innovation

- Pioneer innovative graduate education modalities, program delivery and pedagogies to expand the reach and accessibility of graduate education.

Research Training

- Support researchers, faculties and the research mission of university by coordinating research training for graduate students and postdoctoral researchers.
- Support graduate students and postdoctoral fellows in the development of knowledge translation and mobilization skills as pathways to impact.

Thank you

Thank you to our McMaster graduate community, central service units, graduate students and postdoctoral fellows on your honest feedback and insights that fueled the development of this plan. Through the development of this plan, your input will shape the work inside SGS and across our institution in the support of graduate learning and research training moving forward.

A special thank you to the entire SGS staff team for their insights and tireless work in support of our graduate learning community. Your dedication, passion and creativity has not only helped craft this plan but will be vital ingredients in realizing its potential. Thank you.

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