

# Strategic Research Plan 2021-2026

Canadian Mennonite University

(Passed at CMU Senate on 2021-06-16; updated 2023-04-12)

## Institutional Context

Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) is an Anabaptist Christian university offering academic programs in the arts, humanities, sciences, and business. Located in Winnipeg and chartered in 1998 by the Province of Manitoba, CMU was granted membership in the Association of Universities and Colleges in Canada (AUCC, now Universities Canada) in 2008. The university is guided by four commitments: educating for peace and justice; learning through thinking and doing; extending generous hospitality with radical dialogue; and modeling invitational community.

CMU offers undergraduate and graduate degrees and other university programs on two campuses. The main Shaftesbury Campus offers 19 Bachelor of Arts majors as well as Bachelor of Business Administration, Bachelor of Music, and Bachelor of Music Therapy degrees, along with pre-professional studies. At the graduate level, the university offers Master of Arts degrees in Theological Studies, a Masters of Business Administration, and a Master of Arts in Peacebuilding and Collaborative Development. Menno Simons College (MSC) offers two additional CMU majors (delivered in affiliation with the University of Winnipeg) in Conflict Resolution Studies and in International Development Studies .

CMU's Strategic Research Plan (SRP) outlines a path for research growth at CMU over the five-year period of 2021-2026. CMU's SRP acts a gathering place for research at the institution, helping the institution to connect and present its research agendas, rather than a boundary excluding any particular research agenda. Because the SRP functions to connect research across a wide variety of individuals' work, and across disciplinary and departmental identities, this document names ethical, ideational, and procedural aspects of research that characterize *CMU as institution*, cutting across areas, rather than focusing on particular disciplines or on any particular individuals' research agendas.

This Strategic Research Plan is intended as a living document, evolving through regular review and through collegial faculty processes, aiming to always reflect the most salient common emphases of research at CMU as they are engaged with the priorities of the Tri-Council funding agencies. CMU's Research Office brings the SRP to Senate regularly for attention, conversation, and revision. In addition, the Office of the Vice President Academic initiates periodic review of the SRP and of evaluation of our research activities in relation to it.

## Research Growth at CMU

CMU has achieved exciting momentum in research.

An increase in successful faculty research supported by Tri-Council agencies has prompted other institutional gains. CMU now holds two Canada Graduate Scholarships for its graduate students, each worth \$17,500. CMU's Research Office is better equipped to support the administrative aspects of research due to an increase in Research Support Funds, which between 2018 and 2021 increased by 135%, reflecting increased SSHRC-funded research activity over this time. CMU has received its first Tier 2 Canada Research Chair allocation in 2021. Already eligible for SSHRC funding, between 2021 and 2023, CMU also became eligible for NSERC and CIHR funding, that is, all three Tri-Council bodies. CMU has also received a provisional Certificate of Good Animal Practice and received our first site visit from the CCAC. CMU also received a CRC EDI stipend to develop CMU's EDI policy framework and the institutional environment for (and beyond) CMU's engagement with the CRC program; CMU applied for and received other EDI-related external funding over this time. Finally, CMU has developed exciting momentum towards larger interdisciplinary grant proposals, with external partners, over this time.

This SRP sets out a course of action to deepen the research environment at CMU, building on this momentum.

This SRP's action plan aims to significantly build Tri-Council and other funded research, and to enable both externally funded research more broadly and the CRC's flagship projects to flourish at CMU.

The first CRC at CMU will develop a robust research program in interdisciplinary community health will help set the stage for future CRCs at CMU, and that will build research capacity across the institution. The CRC's work will help define CMU, institutionally, as a leader in community-engaged interdisciplinary research focused on social good, helping CMU to both retain our first CRC and to attract and retain future researchers of international prominence. (Within the CRC's first term, but not at the moment of initial appointment, CMU plans to engage with CFI to bolster research at CMU both during the tenancy of the CRC and beyond; CMU's proposed first CRC program focuses on community-engaged health research, and our CFI proposal will therefore draw on the frameworks arrived at with those communities in the initial discovery stages of the CRC's program of work.)

Equity, diversity, and inclusion are of paramount importance to CMU and to the CRC and CFI programs. CMU is prioritizing candidates from one or more of the four EDI priority areas (women and gender minorities, persons with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples, and racialized minorities) in our first CRC nomination, underscoring the institution's commitment to creating a more equitable academic environment. CMU has engaged with campus-wide EDI planning, in an ongoing process seeking to meet both EDI requirements of the Tri-Council agencies, and the equity needs specific

to our institution. For our first and future CRCs, CMU will monitor and shape both the nomination process and the institutional environment and supports in order to meet the equity targets of the CRC program.

## CMU's Research Distinctives: Community, Students, Interdisciplinarity, Teaching, Justice, Story

CMU is a community-owned, community-rooted institution; a student-centered, academically challenging institution; and a deeply interdisciplinary institution with faculty interests cutting across disciplines. CMU is also a university in which teaching is understood as a genuine intellectual intervention, rooted in and comprising an arena of research. Finally, as a Mennonite- and Mennonite-Brethren-affiliated institution, CMU is oriented towards building justice, peace, and meaningful, welcoming community.

CMU's research strategy builds on these distinctive qualities as a university and aims to contribute as a research institution through the following research priority areas:

- **Community-based research**, emerging from real relationships, in which research is developed with community partners for the flourishing of their communities;
- **Training undergraduate student researchers**, by providing widely available opportunities for undergraduate students to gain research experience and make contributions to research;
- **Interdisciplinary research**, rooted in a shared intellectual culture (not tactical partnerships) in which new questions emerge and can be addressed from complementary and different perspectives;
- Teacher research on **university pedagogy and curricula**, rooted in the significant work of CMU faculty in novel, innovative, and excellent teaching;
- Publicly-facing research focused on **social and environmental justice**, including peacebuilding and advocacy for vulnerable and marginalized populations.
- The work of **memory, story, reflection, and performance in community and land**, rooted in the widely varied ways that CMU faculty have sought to engage and be engaged by the imaginations of the congregations, constituencies, communities and lands that relate to CMU.

Strategic attention to research and collaboration across the whole institution on research are important in maintaining and growing the research environment at CMU.

This Plan aims to support and allow CMU faculty and student research to flourish to the benefit of the CMU community as a whole—including the many communities that relate closely to CMU in

CMU's constituencies, in the province, in Canada, and among our global network of alumni and friends.

## SRP Action Plan

Outlined below are five key steps to move this work forward, stemming from current research realities and envisioning what is possible in five years: better faculty research support through more attention to research leadership and staffing; greater attention to enabling external funding through internal research incentives; work to meet Tri-Council standards and requirements; growing research partnerships; and expanding granting capacity related to infrastructure and program. (Each subpoint marked “completed” indicates a step that has reached a milestone of completion and that continues to receive attention; all other subpoints are presently in process.)

1. Increase research leadership and staffing
  - a. Create Director of Research Grants position (ie. an expansion of the Research Grants Coordinator role) (*completed 2021*)
  - b. Develop an Associate Dean of Research faculty position (*completed 2021*)
  - c. Support the Associate Dean of Teaching & Learning faculty position, who would support, and help to guide and promote the scholarship of university teaching and learning (the fifth named strand in the research distinctives above)
  - d. Course release criteria expansion to encourage research beyond the Tri-Council agencies
2. Foster internal research incentives
  - a. Internal research grants – strengthen internal research grant processes to incentivize and enable more external grant applications
  - b. Coordinate more regular faculty research sharing events that foster collaboration (*completed 2022*)
  - c. Offer PD to build stronger collegial faculty support and skills for research
3. Meet upcoming Tri-Council standards and requirements
  - a. Equity, Diversity and Inclusion requirements in order to hold a CRC
    - i. A public EDI statement (*completed 2021*)
    - ii. A full EDI Action Plan
  - b. Research Data Management institutional strategy (*completed 2023*)
4. Grow research partnerships
  - a. Internally – Centre for Resilience; Centre for Career and Vocation; Canadian School of Peacebuilding
  - b. Externally (the list below is illustrative, not exhaustive):
    - i. Community-based research - Manitoba Research Alliance; Centre for Community-based Research

- ii. Granting agencies supporting research engaging with religion and / or theology - Louisville, Lilly, NetVue
  - iii. Research Manitoba – provincial funding agency
  - iv. Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning (CEWIL) Canada
- 5. Expand granting capacity related to infrastructure and program
  - a. Secure CIHR/NSERC institutional eligibility (*completed 2022*)
  - b. In tandem with 5.a., apply for Canada Foundation for Innovation institutional eligibility (*completed 2021*)
    - i. Develop protocols and procedures for partnering on infrastructure funds between the Academic Research Office and Administration/Operation's grant writing and support work
  - c. Develop a common grant-intake procedure across all types of grants at CMU (*completed 2022*)
    - i. Managing and delegating research-program and research ethics review
    - ii. Ensuring that the necessary supports for a given grant are feasible to put in place (should the application succeed)
    - iii. Work across divisions towards shared support for Infrastructure and Program Grants (aiming to make sure grant opportunities are identified and work coordinated across these areas of grant-writing)

## CMU Research Successes

As we have worked at the steps outlined in this plan, CMU has continuously developed faculty research activity and the institutional research environment, striving for research excellence. We celebrate some of these achievements here:

- CMU's Research Support Fund has continuously increased:
  - o 2017-18: \$35,894
  - o 2018-19: \$37,527
  - o 2019-20: \$44,239
  - o 2020-21: \$60,246
  - o 2021-22: \$80,029
  - o 2022-23: \$102, 858
- CMU now offers 2 Canada Graduate Scholarships to Master's students
- CMU's SSHRC Institutional Grant and CMU internal fund are drawn on to offer internal seed funding to faculty, establishing a base for successful Tri-Council grants.
- CMU has established eligibility with all Tri-Council granting agencies and the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI).
- Faculty have won grants in a wide variety of areas for diverse projects, such as:
  - o Neil Weisensel—Li Keur – SSHRC Connection Grant

- ... partnering with librettist Dr. Suzanne Steele, composing and producing an opera about Louis Riel
  - Jerry Buckland—Financial Diaries – SSHRC Insight Grant
    - ... innovative, collaborative, community-based study aiming for economic health and development
  - Heather Campbell-Enns—Research Manitoba New Investigator Operating Grant
    - ... collaborative, community-based health research
  - Heather Campbell-Enns – CIHR Transitions in Care Grant
    - ... transitions in care for rural older adults
  - Brian Froese—Trekking North—SSHRC Insight grant
    - ... social history of religion in Canada and North America
  - Stephanie Stobbe—Hearts of Freedom Project – multiple funders
    - ... collaborative history exhibit, shown nationally, of refugee and asylum seekers in Canada
- CMU has established a new Animal Care Program, receiving a preliminary Certificate of Good Animal Practice through the Canadian Council for Animal Care.
  - CMU has two Undergraduate Student Research Awards (1 CIHR and 1 SSHRC) to support student intensive research.
  - CMU has made significant progress on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, enhancing CMU’s research quality and CMU’s research environment:
    - Created a statement in 2021
    - Established an EDI standing committee, and received a CRC EDI stipend of \$50,000
    - Holds ongoing training events for faculty, staff, and students
    - Engaged the Centre for Community Based Research to conduct an extensive baseline survey of CMU’s EDI environment. The goal is to work toward an EDI action plan.
  - CMU received a Canada Research Chair allocation of one Tier 2 CRC, our first.
  - CMU completed a Research Data Management strategy completed as of March 1, 2023.
  - CMU completed a large, collaborative joint application with national and international partners for a fifteen-million-dollar Global Affairs international development studies grant, in fall 2022.

## Research Goals and Measuring Success

1. To facilitate a strengthened and distinctive culture of research at CMU
  - a. Measured and understood qualitatively by annually reviewing and accounting for CMU research projects in relation to the strands identified above
  - b. Pass a course release policy at Senate that incentivizes research projects that are both Tri-Council funded and beyond

2. To maintain and increase CMU's current Tri-Council funds , which in turn will maintain and increase CMU's Research Support Funds, Canada Graduate Scholarships, and Canada Research Chairs
  - a. Measured by an increase in year-over-year comparisons of Tri-Council funds won
3. To increase CMU's budget through: increased research dollars that then release other funds (as is the case with the CRC, which will fund a faculty member and off-set staffing costs in research and finance); increased program and infrastructure grants (which at times intersect with research)
  - a. Measured by year-over-year comparisons of FTE and course releases related to research; and RSF and other overhead monies
4. To increase research opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students in collaboration with faculty
  - a. Measured both qualitatively (kinds of research collaboration; meanings and outcomes of research collaboration) and quantitatively (number of instances) each year

## Research Planning and Approval

Research-related policies are monitored and updated, or created anew by the Director of Research Grants, the Associate Dean of Research, and the VP Academic. The policies are reviewed at Senate for decision making.

As a member of Universities Canada, CMU has a mandate to support faculty members as independent researchers engaging in scholarly activity both within and across disciplines, while remaining subject to the methodologies and evidentiary standards appropriate to the disciplines engaged.

Like other small universities, programs of research are partly influenced by the teaching load requirement. As a result, CMU has been imaginative and strategic in the resources it provides in support of research. This support includes course releases to faculty pursuing funded research, a Faculty Research Committee which provides grant writing and administrative support and internal research grants, financial support to present research at national and international conferences, and carefully managed meetings and administrative loads to enable faculty to maximize their time spent on research.

As well, the Office of the Vice-President Academic aims to schedule teaching to provide blocks of time for faculty to engage in research, and to align teaching assignments with areas of faculty research interests. Since students are enabled and required to participate in their own research activity, they benefit from (and, where possible, participate in) the research engagement of their faculty teachers and

mentors. Thus, supporting faculty in their research endeavors is linked to student research training at CMU.

CMU has several committees that evaluate and may offer formal approval, or request changes, to research pursued by CMU faculty. These include the Research Ethics Board, which reviews human-subjects research; the Animal Care Committee, which reviews research with animals; and the Grants Review Committee, which provides review of external grants for compliance with granting body requirements.

Faculty research plans are reviewed on a routine basis in order to encourage the ongoing development of robust programs of research across the university. Further, faculty are encouraged to identify collaborative research ventures with other researchers within and outside of CMU. For the purposes of assessment, promotions, or appointment with tenure, CMU evaluates scholarly and research activity with reference to the individual's discipline, according to the appropriate standards of method and evidence. Hence, peer-reviewed work is viewed favourably in the promotion and tenure process.