

MOUNT ROYAL UNIVERSITY



2024-2030

Students Division Strategic Plan

Land Acknowledgment

Mount Royal University is situated on an ancient and storied land steeped in ceremony and history that, until recently, was occupied exclusively by people indigenous to this place. With gratitude and reciprocity, Mount Royal acknowledges the relationships to the land and all beings, and the songs, stories and teachings of the Siksika Nation, the Piikani Nation, the Kainai Nation, the Îlethka Stoney Nakoda Nation (consisting of the Chiniki, Bearspaw and Goodstoney Nations), the people of the Tsuut'ina Nation, and the Métis.

At the verbal negotiations held to discuss Treaty 7 between the nations and the Crown and Canadian government, Indigenous peoples assumed hereditary lands would be shared and a cooperative future would be built together that was to last as long as the grass grows, the sun shines and the rivers flow. However, many of the verbal promises made to these nations were not reflected in the written version of Treaty 7, created by the Crown and Canadian government. Even then, many promises that were included in the written version have been broken.

What followed were policies of cultural genocide and assimilation that caused profound harm. The original people of these lands were confined to reserves, prohibited from pursuing traditional practices and forced to send their children to residential schools. Rather than building meaningful and mutually beneficial relationships, there was dispossession and exploitation in systems of economic and social marginalization.

As such, Mount Royal University is committed to advancing the success of Indigenous learners and respectfully supporting Indigenous cultural identities and integrity, leading to a good life in all its aspects. Mount Royal will challenge settler colonialism and systemic racism and discrimination by addressing the legacy of broken promises and rebuilding the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. This includes those who now live at the confluence of the Elbow and Bow rivers, a place referred to by the Siksika Nation, the Piikani Nation and the Kainai Nation as Moh'kinstis, by the Îlethka Stoney Nakoda Nations as Wícîspa, and by the Tsuut'ina Nation as Guts'ists'i. Mount Royal will meet these goals by committing to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and adopting and applying the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.



Introduction

At the core of the Students Division is the drive to provide students with the support, services, and programming essential to help them navigate and complete their programs. Focusing on students' individual and collective needs from application to graduation and beyond, each department within the division prides itself in being part of students' developmental journeys. Through inter-divisional and cross-departmental collaboration and the application of innovative practices, we work to demystify processes and provide the support students need to thrive.

The division is committed to developing and delivering meaningful experiences that teach students transversal skills and intercultural competencies. These experiences will help prepare them for their future studies and chosen careers and will contribute to positive social change through one-on-one and group interactions, leadership opportunities, peer engagement and community-building programming, work-integrated learning and study abroad excursions. In each experience, we strive to meet students where they're at and scaffold services to allow them to achieve their personal and academic goals.

We embrace all students whose vibrant identities include diverse backgrounds and experiences and strive to better understand their evolving needs. Our commitment to serving every student motivates us to evaluate and improve our services and programming, creating the best possible experience for each individual.

The Students Division Strategic Plan builds upon the directions and goals established in the University Strategic Plan and will help the University achieve its vision to open minds and change lives. To that end, this document provides the division with a roadmap that will inform decision-making and resource allocation across departments and contribute to the broader institutional aim of holistically supporting students in achieving their personal and academic goals.

The Students Division Strategic Plan has adopted the vision, mission and values of the Mount Royal University Strategic Plan, included on the following page.

VISION 2030

MOUNT ROYAL UNIVERSITY STRATEGIC PLAN

Opening Minds and Changing Lives

Opening minds and changing lives reflects our dedication to providing students with a holistic and transformative education, preparing them to become lifelong learners and active global citizens.

Through their academic experiences and as members of a diverse, inclusive, and supportive community, students will be equipped with the knowledge and skills they need to develop to their full potential and positively impact the world.

MISSION

To provide meaningful and engaged learning opportunities that create individual transformation and societal benefit.

We recognize that every learner who comes to Mount Royal has their own aspirations for pursuing a university education. Knowing their reasons for attending university are as unique as they are, we strive to provide all students with enriching learning opportunities that help them discover and cultivate the knowledge and skills they need to succeed and make a lasting impact on today's changing world.

VALUES

Mount Royal University recognizes the importance of creating a culture where community members share deeply held values. Our shared values will guide our decisions and actions as we work to fulfill our mission and vision.

- » Transformation
- » Belonging
- » Boldness
- » Inquisitiveness
- » Authenticity

Strategic Priorities & Initiatives

We have developed this plan to be aspirational yet actionable, with six strategic priorities and 23 initiatives within our immediate control to affect meaningful change in the student experience and how services and programs are delivered across the division. The successful implementation of this plan will require ongoing collaboration with partners in Academic Affairs, Finance and Administration, University Advancement, and the University Secretariat and will ultimately advance the goals and strategic priorities embedded in the institutional planning framework.

It is important to note that what follows was developed through consultation and feedback provided by staff and leadership and validated through cross-departmental lenses to ensure the plan truly reflects the division's aspirations. Our goal is to innovate and improve our services and programming, extending beyond the student body to include the greater Calgary community and the student and enrolment services profession as a whole. Though presented in the order below, we recognize the strategic priorities and the corresponding initiatives listed are of equal importance.

Strategic Priorities

- » Cultivate Service Excellence
- » Promote Students' Academic Success
- » Support Indigenous Student Success
- » Advance Inclusivity and an Accessible Campus Culture
- » Champion Student Mental Health and Well-being
- » Strengthen Our Community

Cultivate Service Excellence

Mount Royal has a rich history of providing students with the services they need to navigate the administrative, academic and social aspects of attending university. Service excellence underlies every aspect of our work in the Students Division. Our services have become more diverse and complex as we have grown and evolved to meet changing student needs. To continue to deliver the high-quality services we pride ourselves on, and to assume a leadership role in the student affairs and services profession, we recognize the importance of increasing collaboration between departments and investing in employees' ongoing training and professional development.

By taking a collaborative approach to service delivery, we can better share internal expertise, resources, and ideas to deliver services that holistically support students in becoming their best selves. Core to increasing interdepartmental collaboration and the delivery of impactful services across the division is the implementation of an integrated student services delivery model. Through this model, we will readily connect students with the appropriate resources and services they need when they need them. A direct result of this transformation will be employees who become experts in their fields, demonstrating their leadership and knowledge in professional associations and at conferences.

Regular assessment is also integral to our ability to deliver first-rate services and programs. By leveraging quantitative and qualitative data from assessment and planning practices, we will make data-informed decisions about services and programs that will address challenges and improve students' experiences. As part of this culture of continuous improvement, we will explore and adopt current and new technologies that enhance service delivery, including investing in a customer relationship management system to streamline student communications and collaboration between departments and provide data-informed insights.

Strategic Priority: Continuously innovate service delivery approaches to ensure students have a seamless and barrier-free experience.

Initiatives

- Implement an integrated student services delivery model that enhances holistic support for students.
- Invest in technology to improve service delivery across the division.
- Invest in employees' training and professional development.
- Promote data-informed decision-making by implementing ongoing assessment and planning practices.

Promote Students' Academic Success

At Mount Royal, we want students to access transformative educational experiences that align with their academic goals and interests. Delivering a broad [liberal education](#)¹ that prioritizes students' development of [transversal skills](#)² is not limited to the classroom. Our diverse services will also help students develop the critical and creative thinking, communication skills, and interpersonal and intercultural competencies they need to navigate their academic, personal and professional lives.

To meet students' evolving needs, the Students Division will work with students to shape their unique paths to success, including finding the right program. In part, doing this well will require students to be aware of the services they may need to plan their academic pathway and that will facilitate timely program completion. In partnership with Academic Affairs and other institutional collaborators, we will develop joint initiatives to maximize student retention, persistence, and graduation rates.

Critical to providing a transformative education is students' engagement in immersive and self-reflective experiential [learning opportunities](#)³ within the academic curriculum, such as work-integrated learning and global learning programs. Additionally, outside the formal curriculum, students benefit from involvement in co-curricular activities like student leadership and mentorship roles as well as service learning. Within the division, we will focus on helping students navigate these options while continually enhancing and broadening the range of experiential learning opportunities available to them.

Strategic Priority: Promote students' academic success and further their development as lifelong learners.

Initiatives

- Develop an integrated system for students to create an individualized student success plan that encompasses transformational curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular experiences.
- Implement programs and services that prepare students to successfully transition into professional careers or graduate studies.
- Deliver student-centred, research-informed programs and services that support students' development of transversal skills.
- Implement evidence-based interventions that address barriers to student persistence and academic success.
- Expand enriching local and global learning opportunities for students on and off campus and through community partnerships.

Support Indigenous Student Success

Divisionally, we are deeply committed to Indigenous student success and advancing Mount Royal's journey of Indigenization and decolonization. At the core of our efforts is educating students and employees about the history of colonial dynamics between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada and the contemporary realities faced by Indigenous communities.

Through these educational efforts, we intend to advance [ethical space](#)⁴ where Indigenous ways of knowing are recognized and respected alongside Western paradigms. In providing these collaborative learning experiences, we aspire to facilitate meaningful knowledge exchange and nurture authentic allyship between non-Indigenous and Indigenous individuals at MRU and beyond.

We want to ensure that Indigenous students are supported throughout their academic journeys at MRU and acknowledge the systemic barriers faced by Indigenous students due to policies, procedures and practices developed through a colonial lens. We are committed to reviewing and reforming these systems by actively seeking the input of Indigenous students through a holistic approach that encompasses the mind, body and spirit.

In ensuring Indigenous students have the support they need to thrive, we will focus efforts on recruiting and retaining Indigenous employees across the Students Division for students to work with, as they can best understand the culture and the lived realities of students. Further, we are committed to cultivating meaningful partnerships with Indigenous communities for the mutual benefit of all. We honour our relationships with our Indigenous colleagues and will share the load as we embark on this plan together.

Strategic Priority: Holistically support Indigenous students to achieve their success, applying the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Initiatives

- Develop learning opportunities for students and divisional staff to advance knowledge of the impact of colonization and facilitate allyship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.
- Recruit and retain Indigenous employees to holistically support Indigenous students through representation and as role models, providing culturally relevant support and understanding.
- Develop tailored programs and services by building reciprocal partnerships with Indigenous communities.
- Review policies, procedures, and programming to identify and address systemic issues that Indigenous students face at MRU.
- Increase campus community participation in culturally immersive activities, events, gatherings and ceremonies to strengthen connections with Indigenous communities.

Advance Inclusivity & an Accessible Campus Culture

At Mount Royal, belonging and authenticity are part of our core values. In upholding these values, the Students Division is committed to delivering an accessible, inclusive, and respectful experience by working with and for all students to address their unique needs and to provide equitable access to services.

To achieve these outcomes, a foundation of sustainable professional development and continuous learning is needed for divisional employees to ensure everyone has the knowledge and competencies necessary to co-create an environment that embraces diversity, equity and inclusion. Through this investment, we aim to cultivate a supportive campus culture that reflects the student body's diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives.

Employing a collaborative approach, we will work with our community to create an environment where every student can have the opportunity to thrive academically and socially. Within the division, we aim to address the barriers that have historically prevented the full and equitable participation of equity-deserving student populations at Mount Royal by completing a full audit of our services. Within these audits, we will work to dismantle obstacles by embedding the principles of [Universal Design](#)⁵ and [Universal Design for Learning](#)⁶ in our policies, procedures and practices.

In adopting proactive practices, committing to continuous improvement, and embracing our work with a collaborative spirit, we will shape a campus culture that serves the needs of all students and cultivates a sense of belonging. In addition, as a signatory of the Scarborough Charter, we will strive to align the division's work with the Charter's principles and actions wherever applicable.

Strategic Priority: Deliver an accessible, inclusive and respectful experience for all students.

Initiatives

- Invest in employees to develop and sustain the competencies required to inform an equitable and diverse campus culture in service of students.
- Identify and address our systemic barriers that reduce equity-deserving student access and prevent full and equitable participation.
- Identify, co-create and enhance supports that equitably serve the diversity of students at MRU.

Champion Student Mental Health & Well-being

In 2016, Mount Royal University adopted the Okanagan Charter, recognizing the pivotal role universities play in providing a transformative education that supports students' holistic well-being. As part of our commitment to the Charter, we have integrated its Calls to Action and Guiding Principles into this priority to embed student mental health and well-being into the fabric of the institution.

We believe that supporting student mental health and well-being goes beyond any one service or program and acknowledge the pivotal role of staff and faculty in this work. Across the division, we will work to ensure that programming and services promote students' well-being across eight dimensions of health: social, occupational, environmental, intellectual, spiritual, emotional, physical and financial.

To enhance students' overall academic experiences and well-being, we will collaborate with other areas of MRU to provide the necessary training and tools for all employees to support students' well-being and facilitate effective referrals to programs and services. Through these partnerships, we intend to create a campus environment where everyone feels supported, valued and empowered to thrive

Strategic Priority: Embed student mental health and well-being in the work of the Students Division and cultivate a supportive campus community.

Initiatives

- Create and enhance services and programs to address the increasing need for wellness support, positively impacting student mental health and well-being.
- Strengthen the capacity of staff and faculty to effectively support student well-being through the provision of training and resources and through cross-campus partnerships.

Strengthen Our Community

We are committed to building a vibrant campus where students and the MRU communities we serve feel they belong. Through our diverse services, we will work to deliver a broad range of on- and off-campus activities and programming for students to engage in that furthers their holistic development, helps them find community and develop lifelong friendships, and shapes their university experience according to their interests, needs and goals. In addition, students need spaces that promote social interaction and we are committed to providing venues where students can come together and connect, including spaces designed for Indigenous and international students.

As a community-engaged campus, we embrace our role as a member of the local community. We seek to grow our relationships with, and improve the quality of life in, our local areas and find strategic opportunities to provide public access to our campus social and educational events, services, and programming.

Strategic Priority: Encourage students and MRU community members to actively engage in enriching experiences.

Initiatives

- Create a sense of belonging through student-centred curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular programming, contributing to a vibrant and inclusive campus culture that promotes community engagement.
- Provide opportunities for students to participate in an engaging and inclusive campus environment, including building integrated community spaces.
- Offer community-centred programming that is responsive to evolving public interests and needs, including recreational, athletic, cultural, wellness, and educational events, programs and services.
- Enhance the MRU community experience by facilitating student employment and professional growth opportunities within the division.

Next Steps

Implementing this plan requires the Students Leadership Group to prioritize and align initiatives with other divisional and institutional priorities. Where appropriate, initiatives dependent on cross-departmental collaboration will be led by representational working groups and committees. As a guiding document for allocating resources within the division to 2030, individual departments will operationalize these strategic priorities and initiatives through departmental planning activities.

The Students Division's plan is not an isolated document. Rather, it is an articulated set of priorities and initiatives that form an important part of the institutional planning framework and that are crucial to achieving the goals set in the University Strategic Plan. The success and impact of this plan will be measured, in part, through the adoption of institutional measures that this plan will help to advance. If necessary, additional measures will be developed to ensure a comprehensive understanding of progress towards the priorities in this plan.

We are committed to communicating our progress on this strategic plan to internal and external campus communities. The division and the Office of Institutional Research and Planning will collaborate on developing annual performance and progress reports to be shared with the Board of Governors, the Ministry of Advanced Education, and the MRU community. To do this work effectively, we will create internal processes and standardized reporting practices for tracking progress.

While this document sets a course for the Students Division over the next six years, we recognize that external factors may positively or negatively impact our ability to implement the plan effectively. We are committed to continuously reviewing this plan, assessing the progress made, and adapting our work as necessary.

Addendum

The following resources were referenced during the consultation process for this strategic plan.

- » [CACUSS Student Affairs and Services Competency Model](#)
- » [Wellness in 8 Dimensions - Peggy Swarbrick](#)

Medicine Wheel

- » [CBE framework](#)
- » [Blackfoot Medicine Wheel Project](#)
- » [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act](#)
- » [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: calls to action](#)
- » [Scarborough Charter](#)
- » [Okanagan Charter](#)

Endnotes - Definitions

[1] Liberal Education

A liberal education is an approach to learning that aims to develop the whole person by fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, effective communication and ethical judgment. It encourages students to explore a wide range of disciplines, including the arts, social sciences, natural and mathematical sciences, and professional programs. A liberal education is focused on cultivating intellectual skills and civic virtues. Since many work-integration opportunities, travel studies, field schools, and experiential learning opportunities broadly aim to foster not only specific skills but broader civic virtues, they are also part of a liberal education.

[2] Transversal skills

"Transversal skills are those typically considered as not specifically related to a particular job, task, academic discipline or area of knowledge but as skills that can be used in a wide variety of situations and work settings (IBE 2013). These skills are increasingly in high demand for learners to successfully adapt to changes and to lead meaningful and productive lives (UNESCO, 2014)."

Examples include (but are not limited to):

1. Critical and innovative thinking;
2. Interpersonal skills (e.g., presentation and communication skills, organizational skills, teamwork, etc.);
3. Intrapersonal skills (e.g., self-discipline, enthusiasm, perseverance, self-awareness, etc.);
4. Global citizenship (e.g., openness, respect for diversity, intercultural understanding, etc.);
5. Media and information literacy, such as the ability to locate and access information as well as analyze, evaluate and share information effectively and ethically.

(Source: UNESCO Asia-Pacific. (2014). *Skills for holistic human development (Education Policy Brief No. 2)*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000245064/PDF/245064eng.pdf.multi>)

[3] Experiential learning

Experiential learning provides enriched learning opportunities, inside and outside of the classroom, where students learn through action and reflection. It is often the opportunity to integrate theory and practice. At Mount Royal, experiential learning includes (but is not limited to) field schools, simulation learning, Community Service Learning, course-based research opportunities and work-integrated learning (such as practica, clinical placements, internships, co-operative work programs, work experiences, and community and industry research and projects). Students may also participate in experiential learning connected with Indigenous ways of knowing.

[4] Ethical space

"[The] idea of the ethical space, produced by contrasting perspectives of the world, entertains the notion of a meeting place, or initial thinking about a neutral zone between entities or cultures. The space offers a venue to step out of our allegiances, to detach from the cages of our mental worlds and assume a position where human-to-human dialogue can occur. The ethical space offers itself as the theatre for cross-cultural conversation in pursuit of ethically engaging diversity and disperses claims to the human order. The dimension of the dialogue might seem overwhelming because it will involve and encompass issues like language, distinct histories, knowledge traditions, values, interests, and social, economic and political realities and how these impact and influence an agreement to interact. Initially, it will require a protracted effort to create a level playing field where notions of universality are replaced by concepts such as the equality of nations (Ermine, 2007)."

(Source: Ermine, W. (2007). *The Ethical Space of Engagement*. *Indigenous Law Journal*, 6(11), 202. <https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/ilj/article/view/27669/20400>)

[5] Universal Design

Universal Design (UD) is "the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without adaptation or specialized design".

(Source: *The Center for Universal Design, 1997, Universal Design, para. 1*)

Rather than designing products and services for the average person, they are designed to serve and benefit as many diverse users as possible.

When people experience difficulties accessing or using specific products and services, is it due to barriers within the environment rather than barriers within the person (Lantkow, 2011).

(Source: mru.ca/UDL)

[6] Universal Design for Learning

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is an educational framework that guides the development of flexible learning environments to accommodate individual learning needs and reduce barriers to learning. UDL offers flexibility in how learners access material, engage with it and demonstrate their knowledge.



MOUNT ROYAL
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