

Strategic Research Plan: 2014-2018
Concordia University College of Alberta
SUMMARY

Introduction: Institutional Overview

Founded in 1921, Concordia University College of Alberta (Concordia) offers students a university education in a Christian context. It is a member of the AUCC and, with a student population of approximately 1500 with 55 full-time continuing faculty members, is one of Canada's largest independent, non-profit, degree-granting institutions.

Concordia has five faculties: The Faculty of Arts; The Faculty of Science; The Faculty of Management; The Faculty of Education, and; The Faculty of Graduate Studies. It also has an International Office, and an Office of Research and Faculty Development. Concordia offers the following degree and graduate certificate programs: three- and four-year arts and science degrees; the Bachelor of Management degree; the Bachelor of Education (After Degree); the Bachelor of Environmental Health (After Degree); the Graduate Certificate in Public Health; the Graduate Diploma in Psychological Assessment; the Graduate Certificate in Psychological Assessment; the Master of Arts in Biblical and Christian Studies; the Master of Information Systems Security Management; and, the Master of Information Systems Assurance Management. Program development has been accompanied by a corresponding growth of Concordia's research culture, a growth that has been marked by increases in scholarly productivity and the amounts of external funding from a variety of sources.

Following extensive consultations with faculty in September and October of 2013, Concordia revised its previous Strategic Research Plan, defining and retaining four focal themes: (1) the scholarship of learning and teaching, (2) ethics and social responsibility, (3) scholarship and the Christian faith, and (4) natural and physical sciences. Concordia proposes to position a Tier 2 Canada Research Chair in one of these areas, thereby adding to existing strengths and enriching the research opportunities for faculty and both undergraduate and graduate students. The focal areas are not limited to specific disciplines but are activities that connect many faculties and departments, and are multi-disciplinary in nature. Collaboration among individuals in different disciplines is a feature of the institutional academic plan and is aggressively pursued.

Objectives of Concordia's Strategic Research Plan

Strategic research objectives for Concordia have been devised based on information and direction from four separate sources. These sources include:

- A review of Concordia's previous Strategic Research Plan to identify areas of continuing relevance conducted in November of 2013.
- Information derived from faculty research consultations held in September and October of 2013.
- Concordia's Academic Plan, a Board of Governors approved document guiding Concordia's growth and development between 2012 and 2018.
- Concordia's 2013-2015 Collective Agreement with faculty.

Concordia has traditionally focused on a healthy balance among teaching, research, and scholarship. To support this focus, the institution will continue to encourage faculty to link their research with their teaching. The institution is committed to promoting the teaching/research nexus by providing faculty with the necessary support to pursue these complementary activities productively and at a high level of excellence. Concordia's research objectives are as follows:

1. Promote an institution-wide culture of scholarship and research

Concordia will actively pursue the following:

- (a) Articulate, define, and encourage research and scholarly engagement at Concordia.
- (b) Ensure the provision of an adequate policy environment to support research and scholarly activity.

- (c) Focus faculty search initiatives to:
 - fill new and replacement positions with candidates who have excellent records of research and scholarly work, and;
 - seek funding for a Tier 2 Canada Research Chair.
- (d) Provide reductions in teaching for research purposes and internal research grants.
- (e) Encourage faculty in seeking external research grants to support their research, including grants from SSHRC, NSERC, and other sources.
- (f) Provide sufficient and appropriate space, resources, and infrastructure to support research.

2. Facilitate collaboration

Concordia will:

- a) Identify and encourage areas of research and scholarly collaboration, including possibilities for
 - i) Collaborations of faculty within a single discipline at Concordia.
 - ii) Interdisciplinary collaborations at Concordia.
 - iii) Cross-institutional collaborations within Canada.
 - iv) International cross-institutional research collaborations.
- b) Take advantage of Concordia's small scale to promote faculty/student research opportunities and collaborations.
- c) Cultivate and develop unique undergraduate and graduate programs that engage students in creative research.
- d) Pursue community and business ties to encourage more community involvement and research partnerships with Concordia.

3. Enhance the profile of research and scholarship at Concordia internally and publically.

Concordia will:

- (a) Develop campus-wide as well as intra-departmental opportunities for scholarly exchanges.
- (b) Host scholarly conferences and artistic performances.
- (c) Invite internationally recognized scholars as visitors to Concordia.
- (d) Develop mechanisms for sharing Concordia research and scholarly achievements internally and with the general public outside of the Concordia community.
- (e) Promote Concordia-based publications (for example, develop the new Concordia-based Canadian Journal for Scholarship and the Christian Faith).
- (f) Encourage faculty to publish a greater quantity of their research in appropriate outlets, including but not limited to reputable peer-reviewed scholarly journals and scholarly books.
- (g) Highlight Concordia faculty research and scholarly accomplishments in the general media.

4. Focus on areas of research strength while respecting individual research agendas.

A process of consultation with faculty has led to the identification of the following research themes, based on Concordia's existing strengths and potential areas of excellence:

- a) The scholarship of learning and teaching
- b) Ethics and social responsibility
- c) Scholarship and the Christian faith
- d) Natural and physical sciences

Concordia will actively support and focus on research work in these areas, amongst others (and especially collaborative research), while at the same time recognizing that these themes do not encompass all of the research interests of faculty. Concordia will continue to respect the academic freedom of its faculty by also supporting legitimate research activities of individuals that do not necessarily align with these themes. Concordia faculty not working in these areas of strength will suffer no disadvantage, particularly with reference to attaining internal research grants, teaching reductions, and other forms of support.

Major Research Themes at Concordia

This section provides detail on areas of research strength at Concordia. It does not discuss all research activity in these areas but rather provides a sample of scholarly work in progress in a variety of disciplines.

The Scholarship of Learning and Teaching

In keeping with the institutional emphasis on teaching excellence and providing an exemplary university education, many Concordia professors across the disciplines have dedicated their research energies to the development of pedagogical materials and to the scholarship of learning and teaching.

Ethics and Social Responsibility

Part of the central educational objective of Concordia University College of Alberta is to develop in students a sense of vocation that is enriched by a high standard of morality and of ethical awareness. This link between ethical and moral principles and their effects on real-life experience is reflected in the scholarly interests of the faculty, many of whom are involved in research that has a direct social, economic, or cultural relevance and benefit.

Scholarship and the Christian Faith

Concordia's focus on undergraduate studies in religion and its Master of Arts in Biblical and Christian Studies encourages a comprehensive approach to developing a high level of competence in research, writing, teaching and communication skills. Concordia also hosts the SSHRC funded Canadian Centre for Scholarship and the Christian Faith, led by Dr. Bill Anderson, that runs yearly conferences, disperses research grants, and runs the Canadian Journal for Scholarship and the Christian Faith. Members of the Philosophy and Religious Studies Department have produced a number of notable research achievements and continue to work in their respective areas.

Natural and Physical Sciences

Concordia University College of Alberta has built a record of high quality research in the natural and physical sciences. Members of the Concordia faculty have conducted pure and applied research in the sciences and have involved undergraduate students directly in research activities in many areas. As the university expands the challenge over the next five years will be to build on these research strengths and to establish a basis for the next level of development by increasing research support at this institution.

Activities targeted at achieving the objectives of Concordia's SRP (2014-2018)

The following activities are identified as being helpful in achieving the four objectives of Concordia's Strategic Research Plan over the five-year period of the plan:

Objective One: Promote an institution-wide culture of scholarship and research.

- a) Provide a set of descriptors of forms of research and scholarship for faculty based on norms inherent in the various disciplines.
- b) Consider and implement strategies and opportunities for demonstrating the outcomes of scholarly as well as research activities.
- c) Assist faculty in planning, conducting, and disseminating their research and scholarly activity through the Office of Research and Faculty Development.
- d) Seek funding for a Tier 2 Canada Research Chair in April of 2014.
- e) Commence a formal review of all Concordia research policy in 2014.
- f) Provide opportunities for professional learning in the area of research grant writing.
- g) Provide institutional recognition for research accomplishments such as success with external grants, important publications, or external awards and recognitions for research.
- h) Consult faculty on barriers to research at Concordia with a view to reducing or removing these barriers where possible.
- i) Ensure hiring committees include research productivity in the criteria for hiring new faculty, and that the research record of applicants is carefully scrutinized and evaluated against norms for the discipline.
- j) Consider ways of supporting and developing the research agendas of new faculty members.

- k) Continue to provide course relief and/or internal funding to successful on-going projects and promising new ventures, increasing the amount of support provided as possible.
- l) Review internal research grant processes to ensure that they provide optimal support for faculty research.
- m) Increase the institution's ability to provide the appropriate equipment and facilities to conduct research, and identify those areas that will require applications for external support.
- n) Work with Concordia's library to provide support for researchers in both the collection and various library activities.
- o) Work with Concordia's Information Technology department to ensure adequate access to the hardware, software, and databases necessary for research work.

Objective Two: Facilitate collaboration.

- a) In partnership with the International Office identify areas for and facilitate the conduct of international research collaborations.
- b) Provide assistance to faculty wishing to work with colleagues at other Canadian institutions.
- c) Provide research grants to assist Concordia students involved in collaborative research with faculty.
- d) Continue to participate in NSERCs Undergraduate Student Research Award program to enable students to work on research with faculty members in the Faculty of Science.
- e) Set up research 'clusters' of Concordia faculty interested in working on collaborative projects in a common area. These might be interdisciplinary or within disciplines.
- f) Provide informal opportunities for Departments to meet to discuss their research.
- g) Consider how internal research grants might be used to facilitate collaborative research activities.
- h) Work with the Dean of Graduate Studies and Program Development to identify areas of potential student-faculty research collaboration in existing programs or those under development.
- i) Ensure that our nomination for the Tier 2 Canada Research Chair has experience in and/or is willing to pursue research collaborations.
- j) Work with faculty to identify and engage in research partnerships with government, community agencies, or businesses.

Objective Three: Enhance the profile of research and scholarship at Concordia internally and publically.

- a) Enhance and maintain Concordia's research website.
- b) Develop promotional materials advertising Concordia's research strength.
- c) Institute a research presence at Concordia Open House events.
- d) Re-apply for an Aid to Small Universities grant to support the following project (current funding ends in 2014):
 - a. Internal research grants, awarded on a competitive basis
 - b. Maintenance costs for the Canadian Center for the Study of Scholarship and the Christian Faith and the networking, conference, and symposia activities of the Centre.
 - c. Development of the Journal of Scholarship and the Christian Faith
- e) Investigate the viability of an internal publication that highlights faculty research and scholarly engagement, to be distributed within and beyond the Concordia community.
- f) Enlist the assistance of the Communications Office to highlight Concordia faculty research and scholarly accomplishments in the external media and on the main Concordia website.
- g) Support a Visiting Research Professor program at Concordia.
- h) Support the 'Faculty Research Forum'. This is a series of public lunchtime lectures by faculty members on an aspect of their research.
- i) Support the hosting of academic conferences and research fairs.

Objective Four: Focus on areas of research strength while respecting individual research agendas.

- a) Gain Canadian Council on Animal Care certification for an Animal Care Committee to enable research involving animals.
- b) Review policy and functioning of the Research Ethics Board to ensure that it is adequately supported administratively and functions according to the TCPS2 and Concordia policy.
- c) Ensure that the nominee for the Tier 2 Canada Research Chair has a strong record of research in one of the four identified areas of institutional research strength.
- d) Safeguard academic freedom to allow faculty to conduct research and scholarly activities within the boundaries of their interests and the scope of their discipline.

Support for Research and Scholarship

Concordia supports faculty research and scholarship in the following ways:

1. Recognition that engaging in research and scholarship is something that all faculty members must do in order to fulfill their job requirements.
2. Administrative and infrastructure assistance and coordination from the Office of Research and Faculty Development.
3. Internal support for research through project funding. Awards are assigned on a competitive basis.
4. Financial support for conference and research travel.
5. The maintenance of a Visiting Research Professor program.
6. Time-release support through the policy for Reduction in Teaching Assignment for Research Purposes.
7. Time-release support through the policy for Sabbatical Leave.
8. Support for international research collaborations through Concordia's International Office.

Assessment of Success

The implementation of this Strategic Research Plan is the responsibility of the entire Concordia community. Specifically, it will be the responsibility of the Academic Research Council to evaluate the implementation and progress of the Strategic Research Plan. All faculty members are required to submit an annual report of professional activities, with research activities being reported to the Dean of Research and Faculty Development. These reports, plus the special reports required of the holders of research grants and the recipients of reductions in teaching, will allow the Academic Research Council to monitor and assess the relative success of Concordia's plan. Improvements in the following areas will serve as indicators of success:

1. The amount of internal and external funding to support research.
2. The number of faculty peer-reviewed publications and conference presentations.
3. The number of peer-reviewed research grants and awards (such as SSHRC, NSERC, and other external grants) won by faculty.
4. The number of research activities occurring in each of the identified areas of institutional research strength.
5. The hiring of a Tier 2 Canada Research Chair.
6. The level of faculty engagement in research and scholarly activities measured by an increase in overall percentage of faculty participating in such activities as indicated in the annual report.
7. The level of student participation and collaboration in faculty research projects.
8. The number of research collaborations, both with Concordia colleagues and with colleagues at other institutions, including international collaborations.
9. The further legitimization of scholarly activity. Faculty will have participated in demonstrating and documenting scholarly activity not necessarily resulting in formal publication.

Planning and Approval Process

Concordia's Board of Governors has approved this Strategic Research Plan.