

OCAD University

Strategic Research Plan  
Summary 2019-2024

OCAD University acknowledges the ancestral and traditional territories of the Mississaugas of the New Credit, the Haudenosaunee, the Anishinaabe and the Huron-Wendat, who are the original owners and custodians of the land on which we live, work and create.

## Introduction

Building on over 140 years of internationally recognized art and design education, professional practice in art, design and new media, innovative research, and engaged scholarship, our Strategic Research Plan (SRP) speaks directly to OCAD University's Academic Plan – *OCAD University: Transforming Student Experience*, 2017-2022 which re-affirms the central role of knowledge creation and research across the institution. Identified as a key priority over the next five years, the plan establishes 11 ambitious goals for research activity at the university aimed at increasing research capacity, exploring innovative interdisciplinary research programs, and developing and publicizing an inclusive understanding of what constitutes research and scholarship at OCAD University. This Strategic Research Plan provides a direction for how we will achieve these goals over the next five years.

OCAD University's Academic Plan, 2017-22 outlines our commitment to decolonization, diversity, equity and inclusion. Our focus on decolonization and indigenous ways of knowing underlie our Strategic Research Plan and our commitment to the principle of “nothing about us without us” as outlined in our Academic Plan. In decolonizing the academic enterprise, we have the opportunity to reimagine research practices in ways that are meaningful to art, design and media and the principles of decolonization and inclusiveness. We recognize that the active conversations inherent in research across disciplines requires us to rethink our relationship to ancient knowledges, global indigenous and customary knowledges, and the world views inherent in a global, multicultural world.

## Priority Areas of Research and Research Training

OCAD University leads in defining research in art, design and media practice, scholarship, and teaching and learning. Over the past decade, we have built on our history of studio art and design to establish significant leadership in art, design and media scholarship, research and research-creation as a recognized source of knowledge production. The research, scholarship, art and knowledge produced at OCAD University are informed by and impacts disciplines and creative and professional practice in art, design, the social sciences, humanities, and science and technology.

OCAD University is committed to providing research training opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students. Students from all levels participate in research activities, thereby gaining knowledge of research methodologies, including ideas and techniques for critical inquiry and problem-solving.

Students participating in research activities learn, acquire and put into practice skills and competencies from many disciplines. These experiences ensure our graduates are engaged citizens of the world, and can realize meaningful careers by putting into practice the skills and competencies of art, design and media research and research-creation.

OCAD University will continue leadership in art, design and media innovation and research through the following six inter-connected themes:

*Creative action for social change:* Art and design research at OCAD University values different voices and forms of agency. Key to the process of decolonization is a shared commitment to support and centre diverse and marginalized—new, ancient, and customary—knowledges and perspectives. Recognizing the potential for transformation through arts and culture in society and community, OCAD U researchers employ a broad array of socially engaged approaches and methodologies in their work. This theme encompasses research initiatives in art for social change, social innovation, digital inclusion, strategic foresight, and human-centred design. Drawn together, this work shares a primary concern with social justice, activism, health, resiliency, advocacy, and citizenship.

*Relational approaches to place, space, and time:* Faculty members and students at OCAD University are shedding new light on our relationships to both natural and built environments, our impact on these places, and ways of living with the land. Revisioning these relationships is a key avenue to realizing reconciliation. Faculty research encompasses areas of inquiry as diverse as Indigenous knowledge, public art and design, environmental sustainability, biomimicry, urban ecology, and immersive environments. Employing a variety of approaches, OCAD U researchers are developing land-based and human-centred solutions to solve complex challenges and address issues of migration, climate change, homelessness, accessibility, student housing, public transportation, and preservation of historical space.

*Critical mediations and cultural inquiries:* Adopting inter- and transdisciplinary perspectives to local and global inquiries into visual culture, humanities, technology, science and social sciences, researchers at OCAD University critique academic norms and cultural institutions to enact decolonized, equitable, and sustainable approaches to research and its educational outcomes. Cultural historians, critical theorists, curators, creative practitioners and knowledge keepers challenge and rework the ways we understand and share knowledge, whether in the form of Indigenous knowledge and forms of learning, traditional scholarship, old and new media, or cultural objects and practices. As the largest Art and Design University in Canada and among the largest and oldest specialized art and design educational institutions in the world, OCAD University has great potential to grow its reputation as a crucible for research-creation and practice-based research methods that mediate between cultures and disciplines.

*Making knowledge through material, form and practice:* OCAD University fosters new forms of materiality that offer a distinctive understanding of the world around us through the exploration of materials, forms, and creative practice. Faculty members embrace both traditional forms and fabrication practices while also engaging with digitally-enabled art and design practices, processes, and products. The studio environment provides a space of creation that becomes a site of critical inquiry, where the relationships between the makers and forms themselves enable new knowledge to emerge, and offer a chance to implicate communities and cultural contexts. Distinct from and building on anthropological or archaeological studies of material, research under this theme engages materials and forms in relation to creative concepts, aesthetics, embodied actions, and the social, historical and political implications of mediums.

*Design thinking, Indigenous knowledges, inclusive design, strategic foresight and innovation:* Collaborative and ethical problem-based approaches to teaching, learning and research are vital to how we understand our present and future environments, both built and imagined. OCAD University designers, visual and media artists, and strategic thinkers engage communities from across a spectrum of social locations and cultural sectors to investigate and activate innovative solutions to key problems in health care, information and communication technologies (ICT), city planning, organizational development, education, media, and commercial ventures. OCAD U researchers working in inclusive design, environmental design, visual analytics and design for health employ Design Thinking methodologies and human centred design principles to promote deep understanding of real needs and develop innovative solutions that are desirable, effective, and viable.

*Art, Design, Science and Technology:* OCAD University integrates art and design with engineering, science, and health research, building capacity to think and work creatively. Our researchers are advancing the forefront of technologies across interconnected future domains such as the internet of things, mixed reality and user interfaces, acknowledging the socio- technical complexities of

today's human-computer society and the innovative, transformative, and disruptive impact that comes with new forms of media. OCAD University has taken the opportunity to expand unique perspectives in research supporting and engaging the interdisciplinary perspectives of Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Math and Design (STEAMD). This focus is reflected in our Strategic Mandate Agreement 2017-20.

## Canada Research Chairs and CFI Infrastructure Plans

OCAD University currently has an allocation of four Canada Research Chairs (CRCs). Drawn from our areas of research strength and identified priorities for strategic development, funding from the Chairs is used to attract and retain researchers in the areas of:

- Tier 1 in Indigenous Visual Culture and Curatorial Practice
- Tier 2 in Design for Health
- Tier 2 in The Internet of Things
- Tier 2 in Canadian Black Diasporic Cultural Production

These priority areas have been strategically strengthened by the addition of related undergraduate and graduate programs, including the Indigenous Visual Culture program which honours the creative traditions of First Nations, Métis and Inuit art and design practices, and the Design for Health and Inclusive Design graduate programs.

OCAD University has enacted hiring practices to ensure that we address issues of equity and diversity among our Canada Research Chairs. We continue to advertise our CRC positions broadly, including venues that specifically target members of equity-seeking groups. We will continue this practice for future CRC allocations and available chairs. Our established equity targets over the next eight years (2021-2029) reach beyond the required targets to ensure representation from all four designated groups within active chairs. Our Equity Target Plan has been built into our CRC recruitment and nomination process. See [Equity Target Plan 2021-2029](#).

Future CRC allocations and CFI funding will be used to continue to build our research lab and studio infrastructure based on the priorities articulated in this document. The University is committed to supporting equitable access to research labs, studios, infrastructure and support.

Decisions surrounding the allocation of OCAD University's Canada Research Chairs are made jointly by the Vice-President, Research & Innovation and Vice-President, Academic in consultation with the Deans of Faculties and in keeping with the priorities established by OCAD University's Strategic Research Plan. For more information about the policies and Collective Agreements that govern the staffing process for Canada Research Chair positions, please see:

- [Memorandum of Understanding: Tier 1 Canada Research Chair](#)
- [Memorandum of Agreement Between OCAD University and OCADFA 2016-2020](#)

## Measuring Our Success

As a unique, differentiated art and design institution, we recognize the need to encourage activity that is unique and distinct, not easily measured through traditional research performance indicators. Our Strategic Mandate Agreement outlines our commitment to measurement of research success:

OCAD University has embarked on a process to define research activities germane to art and design. This effort has resulted in the development of a framework that provides the university with a way to measure the activities, outputs and impact of research and research-related creation outside traditional measures (e.g., patents, publications, citations), thereby addressing the limitations of these measures. The university is now building on this work to further consolidate the output and impact measures and to incorporate these within our reporting frameworks. This work is important because social and economic productivity demands a focus on design thinking, and the contributions of research in design and art need to be accounted for in order to maximize their impact.

Our framework defines what constitutes research at OCAD University, and what emerges as a result of the diverse activity that constitutes research across our faculties. This measurement will continue to be refined as we define our research approaches, methods, activities and outcomes, the participation of undergraduate and graduate students and faculty from across the disciplines engaged in research, our research capacity and support infrastructure, and the resulting impact in our communities.

Foundational to our operation as a publicly-funded research institution, we have a commitment and accountability to the communities we support and serve to tell the stories that emerge from our research activities. The research enterprise is not complete unless and until we are able to engage our publics in the outputs and outcomes of the work we do. This acknowledges the effort required to engage in knowledge transfer and mobilization activities and in the measurement of success. In keeping with our commitment to decolonization we recognize that there are additional efforts required to ensure community engagement, and that our indigenous colleagues assume additional effort so as to ensure representation on committees, in policies and procedures, and in the documents and artefacts that are produced as a result of research at OCAD University. This is in keeping with our approaches to reconciliation, accountability, and ethical frameworks, which includes our commitment to challenging and securing spaces and resources for indigenous and marginalized faculty.

This Strategic Research Plan will track this progress year over year, including the continual refinement of research and its many impacts. Our approach is sensitive to the context in which we live and work, and is flexible and sensitive to the uniqueness of OCAD University research, allowing for changes in direction and context.

## Institutional Planning and Approval Process

This Strategic Research Plan was written in consultation with a broad cross-section of the OCAD University community and developed under the leadership of the Research Committee, chaired by the Vice-President of Research & Innovation, with the aim of embedding these principles throughout the process.