

Emily Carr University of Art + Design

# Strategic Research Plan Summary

2023 - 2028

Emily Carr University is situated on unceded, traditional, and ancestral x<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əy<sup>ə</sup>m (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), and sə'lilw'ətaʔt (Tsleil-Waututh) territories.

# Introduction

As one of the most research-intensive art and design universities in Canada, Emily Carr University of Art + Design connects art, media, and design practices with some of the most pressing questions of our time. At ECU, we believe that our research can help to transform the world, build healthier and more vibrant futures, and cultivate cultural resilience throughout our local and global communities.

The 2023-28 Strategic Research Plan provides a framework for the growth and development of a rich array of research activity across the university. It reflects the priorities of ECU's research community for research excellence, emergent practice-based research, and impactful cross-sectoral collaboration. It builds upon these successes towards a new cartography of the principles and priorities that will drive our research community into the next stage of growth and excellence. The plan identifies new Guiding Principles, Research Themes, and Strategic Objectives aimed at increasing our community's capacity for engaging in research, exploring innovative and dynamic research programs, and advancing our efforts to build stronger training opportunities, partnerships, and innovation pathways.

Six Guiding Principles will inform the way our academic community works together through collaboration and care to ensure the next stage of research at ECU builds more diverse, dynamic, and transformative opportunities for excellence across art, media, and design practices. To this end, research at ECU will explore some of society's most pressing questions and challenges by centering principles of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion; Ecological Justice; Critical and Creative Practices; Collaboration; Robust Support Systems; and Reciprocity.

## Priority Areas for Research and Training

Our Research Themes are designed to enhance existing research capacity and unlock new research potential across our university. They also demonstrate the ways in which the research ecology of ECU is specific to an art, media, and design context, building on our core strengths and pointing to our long-term goals, while centering the practice-based modes of inquiry that our researchers develop, hone, and share.

**Indigenous Research** Indigenous research at ECU includes important research initiatives led by Indigenous faculty and the Aboriginal Gathering Place, which is dedicated to student projects, workshops, ceremonies, and celebrations of the University's Aboriginal community. Aligned with the priorities of the provincial and federal governments, ECU has continued to advance efforts toward the process of Indigenization and decolonization and is actively engaging with Truth and Reconciliation recommendations. In doing so, the university is developing an intentional focus on the transformative capacity of Indigenous art, media, and design to advance decolonization and reconciliation. These include the equitable access and support of Indigenous research, the self-determination of Aboriginal peoples to set their own research priorities, the decolonization of research operations, and accountability and respect for Indigenous ways of knowing and community-led research work. ECU is committed to advancing and promoting Indigenous research methodologies and Indigenous knowledges across disciplines, material processes, and cultural practices.

**Environmental Sustainability, Ecological Justice, and Climate Action** Ecological changes connected to the climate crisis such as growing ocean acidification, increased forest fires, decreasing biodiversity and extreme weather patterns indicate that human demands are exceeding the capacity of global ecosystems and nearing a catastrophic tipping point. In response, the University is currently undertaking a climate action review as part of the work of the Climate Action Task Force (CATF). Faculty researchers on CATF are recommending expanded research for climate action within the institution, and in collaboration with organizations in the community. Research-creation across art, media, and design provides an opportunity to better understand resources in terms of their social, affective, and cultural dimensions and their material qualities. ECU aims to cultivate experimental, collaborative, and critical reflections that will contribute to ecological wellbeing and regenerative justice, foster collaborations with the more-than-human, and model critical revisions that explicitly counter overdevelopment and fossil-fuel extraction. This research theme at ECU enables our artists, media makers, and designers to address and support climate action and more-than-human worldviews.

**Social Justice, Health, and Community Wellbeing** Social justice, health, and community wellbeing are mutually reinforcing priorities for ECU and our research focuses on both people and systems. This research theme seeks to support the connection between cultural activities and movement building. ECU faculty, students, and staff are engaged across a spectrum of justice-seeking work ranging from grass-roots campaigns to poetic interventions, scholarly engagements to artistic experiments, and across exhibitions and curatorial projects. ECU also supports investigations into the roles of artists, media makers, and designers in relation to broader social and political issues and the ways in which artist and designer-inspired actions can create alternative outcomes and infrastructures. Through this work, we aim to enhance agency and include people with lived experience as co-designers, co-creators, and co-producers. This theme fosters transdisciplinary research and participatory projects that empower a broad range of communities from care workers, health professionals, community organizers, storytellers, social scientists, material scientists, cultural workers, citizens, students, learners, and users, as well as professional artists and designers.

**Experimental Forms of Practice-Based Research** Disciplinary and interdisciplinary material practice as knowledge production has the capacity to build new ways of understanding the world and, in turn, to affect the world by changing modes of creativity, production, use, and engagement with material. Many contemporary artists and designers are exploring how ideas and forms co-emerge through material, conceptual, and embodied ways of working. Our researchers blur the boundaries between traditional knowledge and philosophical inquiry, and foregrounds art's experimental engagement with diverse array of other fields—from physics, biology, ecology, science studies, social sciences and humanities and other artistic disciplines. Artists and designers also continue to develop sophisticated practices for examining new forms of fabrication and production as an increasingly distributed and iterative phenomenon. Importantly, while artists and designers may be inspired by and collaborate with diverse epistemes, they do more than supplement existing knowledge – they actively create it, producing new paradigms and questions. By applying expertise in materials, design, electronics, and art making, ECU aims to create opportunities for public discussion, critical making, and community participation in the act of making as inquiry.

**Creative Engagement and Critical Perspectives in Emergent Technologies** Research driven by critical art, media, and design practices can foster new and more complex understandings of the role that technology can play in shaping the present and future. This space of rapid development provides opportunities for artists and designers to significantly shape our future. As a rich, dynamic creative community, ECU contributes to creative and critical engagements with technology in collaboration with, and through expansive investigations across, legacy and emerging technologies. Our researchers are poised to drive forward advances in technology and contribute to novel and disruptive dialogues with cultural, social, political, and economic contexts, and are at the forefront of creative research that addresses the complex and multifaceted impacts of technology. From industry partnerships that help generate new insights and innovations, to introducing critical perspectives and creativity into our understanding of the transformative possibilities of technology, ECU commits to the continued development of world-renowned initiatives and research that can catalyze new forms of engagement with a range of technologies.

**Land and Place-Based Research** Engaging in land and place-based research connects ECU and its community to where we live, create, and work. It also nurtures discourse, catalyzes critical engagement with the land and with material forms and cultural meanings, and encourages the cross-pollination of ideas between academia, art/design practice, and place-based expertise. Land-based research and radical localism is carried out in collaboration with communities and organizations engaging with concerns about local ecologies and ecological justice. Our researchers also engage with the public sphere on many levels. Socially engaged and public art, media, and design practices in the public realm are vibrant areas of work and investigation. This work has a focus on creating a context and ethical framework for ongoing community engagement, which is expressed through internal and external collaborations, partnerships with industry, academia and non-profits, and innovative curriculum development.

**Critical Pedagogical Methodologies** Pedagogical innovation, experimentation, and leadership are found across our academic community, and we believe it is critically important to accelerate this area of research. We see the iterative and reflexive examination of art and design pedagogies as an unwavering commitment to our students, our community, and our future. Faculty researchers from all areas of the university continuously draw upon diverse experiences and expertise to create educational opportunities that help learners thrive in a world of complexity and interdependence. Developing new approaches to practice-based learning, building broader access to transformative educational contexts, and cultivating replicable best practices for ensuring diverse learners can excel in their chosen field will underwrite the next stage of pedagogical research at ECU. Education in art and design is never static and we will position our faculty researchers as world-leading experts in making-led, contextually-driven, and anti-racist art and design pedagogy.

# CRC and CFI Allocation Plans

ECU currently has an allocation of four Canada Research Chairs (CRCs) that are used to attract and retain researchers who are recognized internationally as leaders in their field. We have assigned these Chairs to areas connected to its thematic strengths outlined in previous Strategic Research Plans as noted below.

As of 2022, ECU meets our current CRC-mandated Equity Target of 1 female CRC. However, as a signatory to the Dimensions Charter<sup>1</sup> and in order to address the systemic gender gap in the national allocation of research chairs and to support excellent researchers from all equity-denied groups, ECU will continue to refine recruitment and retention processes and best practices with an aim to exceed our equity targets by recruiting new candidates from equity-denied communities.

The following table outlines the current deployment of our allocation of chairs:

Research Theme(s)	Tier, Agency	Time Period
Materials Inquiry and Critical Making	Tier II (SSHRC)	2014-2024
Art and Design Technology	Tier II (SSHRC)	2014-2024
Previously: Indigenous and Aboriginal Studies	Tier II (SSHRC)	2015-2021 (Vacant)
TBD	Tier II (SSHRC)	Vacant
TBD	Tier II (SSHRC)	Vacant

**EDI Initiatives for CRC Program at ECU** With support from the CRC Program's EDI Stipend, we are developing a CRCP EDI Action Plan that will enable us to: A) achieve equity targets that align with our institutional goals and the art and design research sector; and B) establish an actionable roadmap for effectively recruiting and retaining current and new CRCs from equity-denied groups. Through this work, we are developing CRC-specific procedures for recruitment, hiring, and retention practices that adhere to the CRC program's EDI Requirements and Practices and align with our institutional EDI Action Plan and ECU's CRC equity targets. This work will ensure that we are able to attract and retain Canada Research Chairs from equity-denied communities and support the career growth of our current and future Canada Research Chairs.

**CRC Infrastructure and CRC Deployments** CFI infrastructure funds connected to our current CRCs have been and will continue to be used to complement the technological resources currently available at ECU to support the specific needs of the Research Chairs. The Associate Vice-President Research and the Director of Technical Services review all planned CFI applications to ensure they fit within the strategic goals of the university. Future CRC deployments will be identified from the themes outlined in this Strategic Research Plan, with a prioritization of appointing a new chair in Indigenous Research. All new deployments will be considered as opportunities for exceeding our CRC-mandated Equity Targets and commitments.

## Strategic Objectives for Supporting Research

**1. Enhance Research Capacity and Access** Building capacity for new research programs and projects will require additional investment. By focusing on enhancing opportunities for researchers to be supported through grants, administrative support, expert guidance on compliance and reporting, policies that can unlock efficient and impactful systems, and more robust access to our renowned technical facilities and expertise, we envision a future where faculty, staff, and students are continually engaging in research across disciplines and through new forms and practices. It is also important to acknowledge that this plan's contribution is part of a multi-faceted approach across the institution that are taken up in ECU's Strategic Plan and the EDI Action Plan to addressing EDI, access, and enhanced capacity.

**2. Create Excellent Training Opportunities** ECU's approach to research empowers new means of production, employment, creative and aesthetic expression, and culminates in a wealth of opportunities for its graduates. Many of our students have opportunities to participate in exciting, cutting-edge research projects at ECU and we see potential for increasing the number of undergraduate and graduate students engaged in research initiatives. Applied research, innovation, and entrepreneurship have also been embedded across disciplines and Faculties, encouraging hands-on, experiential learning opportunities for all students and extensive participation opportunities across inter-institutional networks.

<sup>1</sup> "NSERC - Dimensions - Charter," Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, last modified November 30, 2022.

**3. Strengthen Partnerships and Collaborations** ECU is dedicated to facilitating mutually-rewarding research and partnerships with community organizations, citizens' associations, government, and industry partners across art, design, science, technology, humanities, and health – both locally and globally. These partnerships help fuel experiential learning and professional practice, they develop and enhance research culture, and they expose ECU to novel ideas, practices, challenges, and opportunities to learn and apply new knowledge and practices. The university is committed to strengthening existing partnerships with both the private and public sector, while also developing new opportunities for outreach, collaboration, knowledge creation and exchange. For our students and HQP, we know that transformative outcomes are borne from partnerships and opportunities to access external learning experiences that can drive strong post-graduation employment opportunities and placement. By continually identifying new ways in which we can use our strength as one of the world's top art and design schools to build relationships with industry, we will continue to advocate for the significance of art and design across the innovation ecosystem. ECU will also continue to enable its researchers to build meaningful and impactful partnerships by further developing our capacity to connect people, organizations, companies, and public bodies, proactively bridge-building, pairing, matchmaking, and relationship-building.

## Indicators of Success

Our Strategic Research Plan will guide our activities and allow us to review our progress, learn from the results, and respond to our priorities by reporting back to the university community, to government, to our funders, to our community and industry stakeholders, and to our partners. As a publicly funded post-secondary institution, ECU is accountable to the public and the specific communities with whom we work to share our research and mobilize the knowledge created through our work. Learning from our successes and achievements requires us to be able to set goals and track their progress over time. We also need to ensure this work is aligned with our commitment to achieving equitable opportunities across research and in service of decolonization and Indigenization efforts across the university, which will require sustained and additional efforts and new ways of working.

Indicators of Emily Carr's research impact and evolution will be seen across:

- Robust participation of equity-denied researchers, students, and staff
- Increases in Indigenous-led research projects and funding
- Government sponsored grants and contracts
- Student participation in grant-funded research projects
- Retention of Canada Research Chairs
- Cross-faculty collaborations
- Visibility of research activities on a national and international scale
- Greater understanding within the broader community of creative and applied research and the impacts of art, design, and media practices
- Collaborations with other institutions and community organizations
- Community engagement activities
- Industry contribution and partnerships
- Visibility of the researchers' work within their respective fields and/or the broader cultural sphere
- Impact of participation in research for students and alumni
- Research dissemination and knowledge mobilization

## Planning and Approval

The 2023-28 Strategic Research Plan was written in consultation with a broad cross-section faculty and staff and developed under the leadership of the Research Advisory Committee, co-chaired by the Associate Vice-President, Research, and Research Centre Director/faculty researcher. Our Strategic Research Plan was approved by Senate in 2023 and will serve as a guiding document for the Research and Industry Office staff and leadership, ensuring continued refinement and alignment with Emily Carr community over the next 5 years.