

UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

Strategic Research Plan Summary

Canada Research Chairs Program, Canada Excellence Research Chairs Program, and Canada Foundation for Innovation Program

Introduction

The University of Saskatchewan continues to embrace ongoing strategic renewal in its commitment to the people of the province of Saskatchewan, in its academic programs and the quality of the learning environment, and in the pursuit of research excellence. In the context of an extraordinary academic breadth, the University of Saskatchewan has established an international reputation for achievement in a diversity of disciplines. The University's "[*Strategic Directions*](#)", first articulated a vision for achieving the goals of enhancing academic pre-eminence in scholarship and program creativity with adherence to international standards.

In the spirit of this vision, USask *undertook an [*institutional wide process*](#)* to articulate a definitive set of existing foci of exceptional research and scholarship that have achieved pre-eminence regionally, nationally, or internationally, or are on the cusp of doing so and promote these widely as the University's areas of pre-eminence or '*signature areas*'. This commitment follows upon the earlier investment in identifying broad areas of strength and promise, or research themes as expressed in the document *Extending Horizons: University of Saskatchewan Research, Scholarly and Artistic Landscape (2006)*. Under the auspices of the Vice-President Research and Provost & Vice-President Academic, in May 2021 USask launched a process to renewal and revitalize our signature areas. The outcomes of this process will inform a revised strategic research plan in 2021-22.

The *research themes* within the University's Canada Research Chairs Strategic Research Plan arise from the *Extending Horizons* document and represent areas of strength in the University's collective research and scholarly activity. The '*signature areas*,' enabled by the university's capacity, investments, history, and sense of place, distinguish the University as a leader in Canada and internationally, with recognition based on output and achievement. Importantly, the University's signature areas also reflect relevant issues of national and international priority, contributions to innovation, and broad and inclusive collaboration and engagement. The significance of the signature areas and their ability to define USask in conjunction with these areas of exceptional research and scholarship will become apparent as the signature areas mature and are promoted widely over time.

The Canada Research Chairs (CRC) Program and the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI) provide opportunities for enhancement of research and training capacity in key areas of institutional priority, which will contribute substantively to achieving our goals. The Strategic Research Plan provides the framework within which these resources will be allocated, so that the University can build on its strengths, and pursue the *research themes* and *signature areas* described in the plan.

Objectives of the CRC and CFI Programs

The University of Saskatchewan Strategic Research Plan identifies objectives that will serve the national agenda for increased competitiveness in research and development and improve the lives of Canadians. Key objectives of the Strategic Research Plan are:

- Build on areas of existing research pre-eminence, including signature areas.
- Support emerging areas of research excellence so they reach pre-eminent status.
- Create opportunities to pursue new initiatives identified as of strategic importance to the University, Saskatchewan, and Canada
- Expand opportunities for partnerships and interdisciplinary research.
- Attract and retain outstanding faculty by providing an environment in which chairs can be successful, and where “the best” will want to work.
- Build the infrastructure to support leading-edge research.
- Train highly qualified personnel for Canada’s workforce.
- Enhance opportunities for external funding and the establishment of outstanding research infrastructure.

The University’s CFI and CRC Programs

The USask CRC and CFI Programs are intended to enhance Canada’s research capacity and the training of highly qualified personnel. We aim to attract and retain researchers who are recognized as international leaders, and the provide them with the research infrastructure they need to be successful in a competitive international environment. The University’s CRC Chairs and CFI allocations are targetted to areas of thematic strength with the intention of building the University’s research enterprise and international reputation. The leadership and productive synergies demonstrated by the Chairs, coupled with strategic investments in research infrastructure, creates a research environment conducive to growth in the pursuit of research excellence.

The University of Saskatchewan continues to benefit significantly from resources allocated from the Canada Foundation for Innovation, most notably through the creation of major new facilities. These have included, but are not limited to the Canadian Light Source, the Saskatchewan Structural Sciences Centre, the Ag-Bioprocess Engineering Research Laboratory, the Infrastructure for Applied Biotechnology in Agriculture, and InterVac (International Vaccine Centre), the first Containment Level 3 facility in Western Canada for human and large animal diseases. CFI support has allowed USask to strategically align world-class research facilities with areas of research strength. Further, CFI funding has broadened the scope of existing research, and made possible the exploration of new and emerging areas of research. The University has recognized the relevance of these major facilities to the recruitment of outstanding faculty and the attraction of Chairs and will continue to capitalize on these investments through the strategic deployment of Chairs.

The University also recognizes that the Canada Foundation for Innovation is a key source of funding required to establish the necessary infrastructure essential to the success of our Chairs. Thus, the objectives for the CFI and CRC programs are consistent. The University has been successful in seeking to optimize the funding available through matching funds, in particular the Saskatchewan Innovation and Science Fund, Western Economic Diversification, and from a variety of other local, provincial, and national sources, both private and public.

Allocation of Canada Research Chairs at the University of Saskatchewan as of 2021

Table 1 provides an overview of the allocation of Chairs to the University across the three agencies as of March 2021 based on the results of the CRCP’s 2020 reallocation exercise. Active chairs and nominations in progress as of October 2021 are also identified.

Table 1. Allocation of Chairs, as of 2021

	SSHRC	CIHR	NSERC
Chair allocations as of March 2021	3 – T1	3 – T1	8 – T1
including Budget 2018 chair allocations	3 – T2	3 – T2	8 – T2
Active chairs as of 2021	2 – T1 2 – T2	2 – T1 1 – T2	6 – T1 6 – T2
Nominations in progress as of October 2021	2 – T2		

Research Themes

As outlined earlier, in 2006 the University of Saskatchewan reviewed its research landscape in order to begin to identify areas of pre-eminence, areas of emerging pre-eminence, and areas of strategic importance to the University, the Province, and the Nation. This exercise resulted in adoption of the major research themes, which capture the areas identified as areas of research strength and priority at the University of Saskatchewan and represent the framework within which Canada Research Chairs will be allocated. As the University evolves and its scholarly activities reflect new synergies, these themes have been recast as appropriate, with the previous theme for *Materials Science* folded into the theme for *Technology and Science*. The university's *research themes* are: ***Culture and Society; Indigenous Peoples; Environment, Natural Resources and Sustainability; Technology and Science; and Human and Animal Health.***

Within the framework provided by the research themes, the areas of pre-eminence or signature areas augment these major themes and represent areas of depth and focus which distinguish the University's collective research and scholarship. Broadly defined, the University's *signature areas* are:

Indigenous Peoples: Engagement and Scholarship;
Agriculture: Food and Bioproducts for a Sustainable Future;
Energy and Mineral Resources: Technology and Public Policy for a Sustainable Environment;
One Health: Solutions at the Animal-Human-Environment Interface;
Synchrotron Sciences: Innovation in Health, Environment and Advanced Technologies; and
Water Security: Stewardship of the World's Freshwater Resources.

Allocation of Chairs Planned for 2021-2022

The University of Saskatchewan is entering a period of extensive renewal in our CRC program. In the upcoming five years, the institution anticipates significant turnover in Canada Research Chairs due to natural end of chair terms, resignations, and unsuccessful renewals. Nationally, institutions are subject to reallocation, as changes in relative success in competition for Tri-Agency funding bears on entitlement. USask has a total of 12 Canada Research Chairs (5-T1, 7-T2) available for allocation until 2022.

In order to take advantage of strategic opportunities, it is essential that the University retain a degree of flexibility in the allocation of available Chairs. This flexibility is exercised judiciously and

after consideration by the USask Research Chairs Oversight Committee. In the last round USask exercised flexibility to increase the number of SSHRC chairs. Current searches as well as a number that will be launched fall/winter 2021-22 adhere to the allocation by Tri-Agency.

Table 2. Anticipated Allocation of Chairs by Research Area, Strategic Research Plan 2021-22

	SSHRC	CIHR	NSERC
Culture & Society	1 – T1		
Indigenous Peoples	1 – T1	1 – T2	
Technology & Science			1 – T1
Human & Animal Health		1 – T1 1 – T2	
Environment, Resources & Sustainability	1 – T2		1 – T1

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

The university’s mission, vision and values statements describe USask’s commitment to promoting diversity, inclusion, equity, and meaningful change. Awareness of these intrinsic values is actively promoted at all levels of the university. From the President’s Office, and his messaging, to the active participation of Human Resources (HR) in ensuring that diversity, inclusion, and equity are imbedded in discussions that influence, shape, and direct development, leadership and organizational culture to reach institutional goals of a diverse and inclusive university. The university planning process currently underway reflects our commitment to the principle of diversity. Embedding this concept into the fabric of these strategic planning efforts will focus the university’s work in the future and emphasize to our community its importance in all we do.

USask’s [CRC Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan](#) (updated March 16, 2020) reaffirms USask’s commitment to diversity, inclusion, and equity, and aligns with the federal government’s policies on non-discrimination and employment equity.

Allocation of Chairs to Internal, External Candidates

In accordance with the intent of the CRC Program to increase the number of outstanding scholars at Canadian universities, our intent is to place an emphasis on national and international searches, and it is expected that the majority of appointments will be to candidates external to the USask and from outside Canada. Offers are made to internal candidates only to retain exceptional scholars critical to develop areas of strategic importance and to address equity targets.

Assessment of Progress

Contributions made by Chairs will be assessed by a number of indicators to determine their success in meeting the objectives of the CRC Program. Specific expectations for Chairs may vary considerably across disciplines, so that indicators will not apply equally to all Chairs. Nevertheless, significant activity is expected to occur within each of the following five categories, and the progress of each Chair will be assessed against appropriate indicators within each category.

- High Quality People
- Significant Regional, National, and International Impact
- Ability to Attract Resources
- Significant Collaborative Activity
- Significant Activity Output

A comprehensive review of the accomplishments of the Chair, undertaken during the final year of the term, will inform the process for recommendation on renewal or reallocation of the Chair. The CRC Advisory Committee, a body of senior academics appointed by the USask Research Chairs Oversight Committee, is assigned the task of review of the renewal documentation and provides feedback to the Chairs and advice to the Oversight Committee.

Planning and Approval Process

Released in 2018, USask's current strategic plan (nīkānītān manācihitowinihk in Cree and ni manachīhitoonaan in Michif which translates as "Let us lead with respect.") is guiding institutional investment and focus until 2025. The plan identifies 12 major goals across 3 pillars: a) Courageous Curiosity: b). Boundless Collaboration and c) Inspired Communities. The planning process was informed by extensive engagement and dialogue both within and external to the university to identify areas and activities of strategic importance to the institution and society.

Final authority and responsibility for the Research Plan, the allocation and nomination of Chairs, and the allocation of internal resources rests with the University President. The President is advised by the USask Research Chairs Oversight Committee, consisting of the Provost and Vice-President Academic and the Vice-President Research; the Vice-Provost Faculty Relations, Associate Vice-President Research and Director of the Research Acceleration and Strategic Initiatives attend all meetings as resource personnel. A CRC Advisory Committee provides a forum for collegial consideration and serves in an advisory capacity to the Oversight Committee. This committee consults widely with members of the University community in terms of allocations to the research themes and signature areas and the selection of appropriate candidates.

CFI applications are developed under the guidance of a CFI Advisory Committee, chaired by the Vice-President Research or designate, who makes a recommendation to the Vice-President Research. The VPR is then responsible for communication of advice to the President.

USask is in the process of renewing the signature areas/strategic theme areas which will be the basis of a new Strategic Plan. Discussions will conclude in Spring 2022 at which time, a revised Strategic Research Plan will be developed for post-2022. The new Strategic Research Plan will be developed through an iterative and collaborative planning process undertaken through University Council and committees of Council.