



September 6, 2023

VPR Report to Senate # 712-September 13, 2023

Colleagues, welcome back to another Fall term, after what was, I hope, an enjoyable and refreshing summer. I look forward to the opportunities the coming months will bring, as we continue to build research capacity at Brock and celebrate the remarkable achievements of Brock researchers at all levels.

Over the summer the research enterprise team was extremely active in launching new programs and processes to improve services, achieve our strategic plan goals, and support researchers preparing for grant submissions in the coming weeks. We also received a great deal of excellent news about research funding and awards, some of which can now be publicly reported and some of which remains embargoed by funding agencies for the time being.

Scarborough Charter: Research Enterprise Action Plan

In late 2021, Brock University signed the Scarborough Charter on Anti-Black Racism and Black Inclusion. Among the aspirations of this important document is the call to build “concrete research support practices, including mentorship and sponsorship, to encourage Black faculty thriving through the academic ranks and into positions of research leadership...” Last year and early 2023 saw the beginning of a consultation between members of the Black Community Forum at Brock (BCFaB) and heads of the central research units, to identify barriers and possible opportunities surrounding the engagement of Black scholars with research practices and structures at Brock.

Over this summer, the research enterprise team reviewed this valuable input and drafted an action plan aimed at lowering barriers and creating opportunities in support of Scarborough Charter goals, in light of the recommendations of BCFaB colleagues. This consultation is ongoing, and is already generating action items and further planning opportunities. I and my colleagues in the research enterprise are grateful to BCFaB members for the insights and highly constructive suggestions that continue to inform the action plan.

Research Impact Unit In ORS

The Office of Research Services inaugurated a Research Impact Unit over the summer, soon to be based in the newly designated the Research Impact Hub in Rankin Family Pavilion. Led by Jayne Morrish, this unit will celebrate the impact of Brock researchers, and systematize and help integrate Brock’s resources for knowledge mobilization, knowledge translation, and research impact. The Research Impact Hub in RFP 216 will serve to help visitors and community members understand the many powerful differences that Brock researchers make in Niagara Region and around the world.

Research Security Updates

ORS is working closely with counterparts at other universities across Canada, including dedicated research security experts, to settle on standard practices and to anticipate changes and implementations of this rapidly changing set of policies.

Our entire sector continues to await further direction from the federal government about foreign entities of security concern, and research areas classed as sensitive, but the prevalent current understanding is that new research security requirements for Tri-Agency funding programs will involve researchers completing attestations about the research affiliations associated with projects. Due to delays, most competitions with fall deadlines will not be subject to the processes.

Research Travel Now Exempt From Travel/Meal/Hospitality Pre-Approval

At its Cycle 5 meeting, the Brock Board of Trustees approved a revision to the University's Travel, Meal, and Hospitality Expense Policy that exempts research travel from key provisions of the policy. Previously, research travel was subject to the same process that governs university business travel, requiring pre-approval for expenses above \$4000. This pre-approval (now \$5000 for business travel) no longer applies to research-related expenses.

This change should significantly reduce paperwork and reimbursement issues for many researchers. I note that all other internal and external research funding use policies and expense eligibility rules, including those imposed by external funders, continue to apply to research travel, meal, and hospitality expenses.

SSHRC Insight Grant Summer Working Group

The Office of Research Services ran a 4-part series of workshops and information sessions covering different elements of a SSHRC IG application. Researchers learned, and in many cases shared, advice and experience of winning these awards. Input from research officers and from fellow researchers is of course a critical means of generating high-quality grant applications; I encourage colleagues to seek feedback and to contribute feedback in turn on proposal drafts.

Brock Grant and Award Successes Announced

Congratulations to [Brock researchers](#) in NSERC-funded fields, whose outstanding proposals led to historic 2022 institutional highs in funding levels, applications and successful grants in NSERC Discovery Grant (including Discovery Launch Supplements, Discovery Development Grants, and Northern Research Supplements) and Research Tools & Instruments programs.

Similarly remarkable success came in the form of nearly [\\$3.5 million in SSHRC funding](#) for Brock scholars, including \$2.5 million for a SSHRC Partnership Grant to fund [Staging Better Futures](#), a project led by Professor Jennifer Roberts-Smith (DART).

Brock researchers were also awarded nearly \$300,000 in infrastructure support through the John Evans Leadership Fund program of the Canada Foundation for Innovation. These funds are typically matched through a provincial program of the Ontario Research Fund.

Finally, it is a real pleasure moreover to congratulate Dr. Karen Campbell, Associate Professor of Psychology, on the renewal of her Canada Research Chair (Tier II) in the [Cognitive Neuroscience of Aging](#). I look forward to sharing other excellent news of grants and research awards, as these pieces of good news are unembargoed!

Research Honours, Prizes, Awards and Distinctions Program Launches

A big welcome to Dr. Snežana Obradović-Ratković to the office of the VPR. She joins our team as the Research Awards Program Facilitator, and will be developing and implementing a comprehensive Honours, Prizes, Awards, and Distinctions (HPAD) program. The mandate of this role is to work with partners across the University to maximize the number of successful nominations for national and international awards for Brock researchers. This work will enable the celebration of Brock researcher achievements and continue to enhance the research reputation of Brock University. Snežana has already met with several Deans and other colleagues to review the opportunities and interests for various Faculties.

Student Research Travel Supplements

On the basis of researcher input and helpful conversations with BUSU and GSA leadership teams, the Office of the VPR has designated inaugural funding for research travel support for both undergraduate and graduate students. The implementation of these two pilot programs is now under discussion; I will report further as the details are settled.

Research Management System Progress

I am happy to share progress on the design and implementation of our new Research Management System, Synto. Once implemented, the RMS will serve as important infrastructure to integrate and automate the range of services offered across the research enterprise at Brock. Beta-testing of one of the four modules of this system, specifically related to the Research Ethics Boards, was open earlier this year, with a number of Research Ethics Board (REB) applications submitted and reviewed. This testing phase provided an extremely valuable 'lessons learned' analysis, which influenced improvements in the design process.

Since that time, significant progress has been made on the system design across all four modules, with a focus on optimal user experience. This fall, the research community will be reengaged in testing to inform final updates before a full launch in early 2024, including multi-format training opportunities for users.

Brock LINC Updates

Organizational Alignment: Beginning September 5, the Partnerships, Innovation, and Intellectual Property Advancement (PIIPA) team transferred from the Office of Research Services and joined the Brock LINC.

This step integrates Brock University's central expertise in innovation, entrepreneurship, commercialization, IP stewardship, business development and partnership support into a single unit with a shared mandate. The realignment will support growing capacity and take advantage of natural synergies within the research enterprise, especially in planning and implementing institutional strategies around commercialization, innovation, and partnerships.

NAVIGATE: This summer wrapped up the second cohort of NAVIGATE, the Brock LINC's idea-stage entrepreneurship program with 12 participants completing the program. This included seven students, three community members, and two faculty members.

Congratulations to the [two award winners](#) for the student and community pitch competition in August:

- Brock Bachelor of Business Administration student Abhinav Garg won the NAVIGATE Student Award of \$2,500 for his pitch on [Manor Crypto Indices](#), which simplifies crypto investing with diversified crypto baskets.
- Community member Connor Kucharic, founder of [NurseRecruit](#), was the winner of the NAVIGATE Community Award of \$2,500. NurseRecruit is a virtual career fair platform to streamline recruitment and to connect healthcare facilities with nursing candidates.

RFP 300 Updates: Construction in RFP 300 is nearing completion. The innovation and collaboration space at the Brock LINC has new doors installed to create an enclosed co-working space for staff and entrepreneurs participating in LINCubator, NAVIGATE and the Entrepreneurship Co-op. The broader innovation and collaboration space will continue to remain open to the Brock and Niagara community. Starting on September 6, the Brock LINC will require all visitors to the space to sign in at the RFP 300 reception desk.

T. Kenyon
Vice-President, Research