



**Brock University**  
**Academic Plan**

| 2023-2028





# Land Acknowledgement

Brock University acknowledges the land on which we gather is the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe peoples, many of whom continue to live and work here today. This territory is covered by the Upper Canada Treaties and is within the land protected by the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Agreement. Today this gathering place is home to many First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples and acknowledging reminds us that our great standard of living is directly related to the resources and friendship of Indigenous people.



# University vision, mission and values

## Vision

Brock University is a dynamic, comprehensive university that makes a positive difference in the lives of individuals in the Niagara Region, Canada, and the world through leadership, innovation, and excellence in learning, teaching, research, scholarship, and creativity across disciplines.

## Mission

Brock flourishes through the scholarly, creative, and professional achievements of its students, faculty, and staff. We share a common purpose, recognizing and honouring knowledge pursued through diverse perspectives and approaches. Our academic mission is to nurture and support our students and faculty in the discovery of knowledge through exemplary scholarship, teaching, and service.

We provide engaged, experiential, high-quality undergraduate, graduate, and professional education. Our graduate programs enhance Brock's growing reputation for excellence in teaching, research, creativity, and innovation. We provide a transformative experience for our students inside and outside the classroom by helping to develop their full potential as educated and engaged citizens in local and global communities. Brock graduates go out into the world as leaders, with a track record of entering fulfilling careers across all disciplines.

Brock University works to enhance the economic, social, cultural, and intellectual lives of the communities around us — Niagara, Ontario, Canada, and globally — and to demonstrate the vital ways in which we contribute to the health, well-being, and betterment of society in the 21st century.

## Guiding values

Brock is committed to the following values as it strives to make a positive difference in the lives of its students, staff, faculty, and communities.



**Integrity  
and respect**



**A unique student  
experience**



**Freedom of thought  
and expression  
coupled with academic  
responsibility**



**The generation  
and mobilization  
of knowledge**



**Innovation through  
disciplinary and  
transdisciplinary  
scholarly activities**



**Inclusivity,  
diversity, equity**



**Reconciliation  
and decolonization**



**Sustainable, accountable,  
transparent stewardship**



# Brock's planning ecosystem

The academic plan is part of an ecosystem of strategic planning documents, all of which interact with each other and reinforce key institutional commitments and priorities.

## Institutional Strategic Plan

The [Institutional Strategic Plan \(2018-2025\)](#) helps Brock balance and maintain its trajectory of excellence as the university of choice for students, staff, and faculty.

The Institutional Strategic Plan describes Brock University's history and its current environment, including our challenges and opportunities. The Plan outlines four strategic priorities, each with goals and actions, to be achieved before the end of the Plan in 2025:

- Offer a transformational and accessible academic and university experience
- Build research capacity across the University
- Enhance the life and vitality of our local region and beyond
- Foster a culture of inclusivity, accessibility, reconciliation, and decolonization

## Unit-level strategic plans

Unit-level plans created by academic and administrative units identify ways in which their goals and objectives contribute to and align with those of the Institutional Strategic Plan.

## Priority-specific planning documents

In some cases, priority-specific plans were developed to coordinate actions in strategic priority areas that cross academic and administrative units. In many cases, the plans also touch on several priority areas.

For example, Brock's community engagement strategic plan, titled '[Regional Community Builder](#)', contemplates the University's role in the community while examining how Brock's activities can contribute positively to the local area. While most closely linked to the strategic priority to 'enhance the life and vitality of our local region and beyond', the community engagement plan also overlaps with some of Brock's academic and research strategic objectives.

## Strategic Mandate Agreements

The Province's Strategic Mandate Agreement process is intended to promote institutional differentiation in Ontario's college and university sectors. The first agreements, covering the period from 2014 to 2017, required institutions to outline areas of strength and unique contributions to Ontario's post-secondary landscape. Brock's third Strategic Mandate Agreement (2020-2025) responds to the province's performance-based funding model, establishing weights and measures in specific funding areas.

The [Strategic Mandate Agreements](#) exist alongside internal strategic documents as a testament to Brock's role in Ontario's post-secondary system and its public commitment to looking continuously for ways to enhance existing programs and activities to best serve our students and community.





# Brock's Academic Plan

Brock's Academic Plan outlines the University's institutional priorities with respect to its academic operations. The Academic Plan will help direct efforts and resources to those activities that align with the priorities identified in the report. In doing so, the Academic Plan expands and sharpens the focus on objectives listed in the Institutional Strategic Plan priority area to “offer a transformational and accessible University experience.”

The Academic Plan covers the period 2023 to 2028, spanning beyond the life of the current Institutional Strategic Plan and thereby providing a foundation for the next strategic planning exercise.

While research is unquestionably an academic activity, Brock's research activities and strategic aspirations are developed in separate planning documents (e.g., [Brock's Research Enterprise Strategic Plan](#)) and are not the primary focus of the Academic Plan. However, the many intersections at Brock between research and student-facing teaching and learning activities figure prominently in the Academic Plan. Similarly, the strategic pillar to enhance the life and vitality of our local region and beyond is formally addressed in documents in such as Brock's Community Engagement plan.

Given the essential role of academic programs and the teaching and learning experience in community engagement and fostering a culture of inclusivity, accessibility, reconciliation, and decolonization at Brock, these themes appear throughout the Academic Plan.

# The Academic Plan in context:

## Learning the lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic

Brock's Academic Plan is heavily informed by the experience and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. From the moment the university sector pivoted to online learning in March 2020 to the first significant return to on-campus learning in September 2021, the pandemic challenged Brock students, staff, faculty members and librarians to think differently about teaching and learning. Everyone had to take steps to ensure high quality, meaningful, and supportive experiences even in difficult and uncertain times. The innovations that were realized during this period were numerous and have shaped how we think about post-secondary education.

### **The pandemic had many negative effects on the University:**

- The pandemic exacerbated existing inequities, including those related to health, housing and food security, stable employment, and access to technology. Already-vulnerable students experienced a negative impact on well-being, and many barriers to learning were rendered more visible.
- The pandemic created obstacles to the continuity of certain academic operations. While some academic programs, such as those in health care and related fields, were exempt from government restrictions and operated on campus throughout the pandemic, most courses, including labs and other experiential learning activities, needed significant revision and creative thinking to achieve the desired learning outcomes while operating in an online environment.
- The pandemic had a major impact on University finances, especially in the 2020-2021 fiscal year. The absence of students on campus meant that the University's ancillary services, including residences, were unable to operate and generate revenue. This resulted in significant financial losses that were largely mitigated by limiting capital expenditures.
- The loss of ancillary revenue was compounded by a decrease in enrolments, especially international enrolments. While uncertainty around the evolution of the pandemic, its economic impact on families, and the forced shift to online learning affected domestic students, many international students were unable to travel to Canada to study. Those who tried to study online from their home country faced additional challenges, including time zone changes and internet access.
- Finally, restrictions on campus spaces and limitations on gatherings and public activities meant that the University could not recruit students in the ways in which it was accustomed, driving efforts online instead.

### **At the same time, the pandemic led to or hastened innovations that are now pointing the way to the future:**

- The COVID disruption required Brock to be flexible and innovative in the way it runs its operations. From online teaching to working from home, the lack of general access to campus led to the adoption of innovative virtual methods.
- In most cases, these innovative methods were grounded in technology. This provided an opportunity to experiment with and assess Brock's IT infrastructure, including the affordances and gaps of the various technologies.
- The disruption to everyday life led all of us to re-evaluate what we are doing and the nature of our work and learning. Students gained an opportunity to view their education – its form and purpose – differently and to reflect on how this worked for them and how it could be improved.

The Academic Plan provides a moment to reflect on the lessons we have learned from the pandemic experience and revisit how our longstanding assumptions about 'what we do' and 'how we do it.' This is also an opportunity to design a future that prioritizes care, especially for the most marginalized members of our university community.



# The Academic Plan in context:

## Building a more equitable future

An important metaphor emerging from the pandemic was that although we were in the same storm, we were not all in the same boat. For example, while the pandemic brought many aspects of our lives to an abrupt halt, this excluded an end to violence against socially marginalized people. For example, the lockdowns exacerbated gender-based violence against women and their children, leading to overwhelming demand on inadequately funded social service providers. BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour) people continued to experience law enforcement violence, leading to widespread activism and a growth of the Black Lives Matter movement. And in their efforts to protect Indigenous lands and our collective global fate determined by colonialism and global climate change, Indigenous peoples faced violence and criminalization.

In addition to ongoing violence, the pandemic was also marked by exposures of historical colonial violence against Indigenous peoples. Ground penetrating radar surveys of the lands surrounding residential schools confirmed for Canadians what Indigenous peoples have always known: unmarked graves of thousands of children who died at these institutions.

The pandemic also ushered in some changes that offer some marginalized communities hope. For example, the mass move to virtual interactions provided a reprieve for many people with disabilities. The expansion of telehealth options removed barriers to accessing healthcare for many. And the embrace of remote work helped reduce the cost of living while allowing for greater flexibility in balancing personal and professional obligations.

We are at a critical juncture, a time when we can draw on the lessons of the pandemic and think differently about how we design and deliver a transformative, supportive, and inclusive academic experience, one that prepares our learners to tackle the global challenges reflected in the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#). It is time for Brock to lead, to innovate, and to foster progressive change.







# Building on our strengths and innovating for the future

The Academic Plan focuses on leveraging our existing strengths and holding the gains with respect to the innovation that has occurred over the past two years, while also leaning into innovative ideas to enhance our current and future academic experience.

The priority areas make clear our belief that strong student supports and services are critical to a rewarding academic experience.

Some priority areas align more directly with undergraduate education, while others are focused more heavily on graduate students. Most themes, however, cross these boundaries and apply to all students' academic experience.

Finally, please note that the term “experiential education” is understood to include all types of experiential learning, including work-integrated learning models such as co-op, as well as other experiential elements integrated into courses as per our [Senate-approved definitions](#).





# Generating the plan:

## Method and process

The need for an Academic Plan to complement Brock's strategic priorities as outlined in the [Institutional Strategic Plan](#) was identified in the summer of 2021.

The creation of the Academic Plan began in September 2021 and was a collaborative activity between the Provost & Vice-President, Academic and the Planning, Priorities, and Budget Advisory Committee (PP&BAC) of the University Senate. PP&BAC provided regular guidance and feedback on the evolution of the project. The Board of Trustees received regular updates and was consulted throughout the creation process.

In the spirit of reflection on COVID and its lessons, the creation of the Academic Plan began with an online survey of Brock students, staff, faculty members, and librarians. The survey was active between November 10 and December 10, 2021. It included five short-answer questions that sought to identify key elements of the student and academic experience at Brock, as well as potential directions for the future. The survey was promoted through various communications channels, including the Provost's newsletter, the Brock News, through the Brock University Students' Union and the Graduate Students' Association, and by direct email.

In total, 419 responses were received, including 224 from undergraduate and graduate students, 94 from faculty members and librarians, and 101 from staff.

The themes that emerged from these data formed the basis for a draft Academic Plan, which then became the subject of further consultation. The draft plan was brought to a number of Senate committees for discussion, as well as to various senior administrative tables. The draft document was also discussed with both student associations. Finally, the draft academic plan was posted online for public consultation between April 6 and May 2, 2022. The plan was then revised based on the comments received.

The Academic Plan underwent a final series of consultations at Senate committees between September and November 2022 before being unanimously recommended to Senate for approval by the PP&BAC. It was approved by Senate for approval on January 18, 2023.

# Academic Plan Institutional Priorities





## PRIORITY 1:



# High-Quality and Meaningful

- Aligned to the founding charter, Brock will support students in their reflections on their larger purpose and meaning in life, with the intention that they leave Brock with a greater sense of self and community.
- A high-quality and meaningful educational experience is one that is aligned with learning outcomes, engaging, supportive, and provides opportunities for experiential learning and high achievement.
- Learning environments, both physical and digital, should foster collaboration and community.
- Learning assessments should be authentic, effective, and designed to scaffold skill development.
- Learning experiences should allow for engagement with research at all levels of study through effective faculty mentorship.

## Actions

### In pursuit of this priority, Brock will:

- a. Ensure that the appropriate foundations of a discipline or field are incorporated into programs to allow for the scaffolding of creative and innovative thinking;
- b. Invest in the development of robust professional development opportunities for faculty, academic staff, and graduate students, including in the design of effective learning experiences and assessments across all course delivery modes;
- c. Review and support the expansion of innovative experiential learning opportunities across the campus to ensure that all Brock students are involved in engaging experiences that foster critical reflection on their personal and professional growth;
- d. Modernize the current co-operative education system in order to ensure it can sustainably meet the growing demand and evolving needs of students and the labour market;
- e. Develop a multidimensional plan and associated resources for students, faculty members, part-time instructors, and teaching assistants that addresses the root causes of academic misconduct and promotes and supports academic integrity throughout the Brock community;
- f. Identify and promote research opportunities at the undergraduate and graduate levels;
- g. Enhance physical and digital learning environments to support the delivery of high quality educational experiences across all course delivery modes;
- h. Expand graduate experiential learning opportunities such as in-course offerings, global exchanges, and industry-based work-integrated learning experiences;
- i. Increase student engagement in the campus-wide co-curriculum;
- j. Expand opportunities for more global-oriented learning experiences (e.g., Collaborative Online International Learning, international field courses, global work-integrated learning) that can leverage online and travel options to expand understanding of global issues.





## PRIORITY 2:



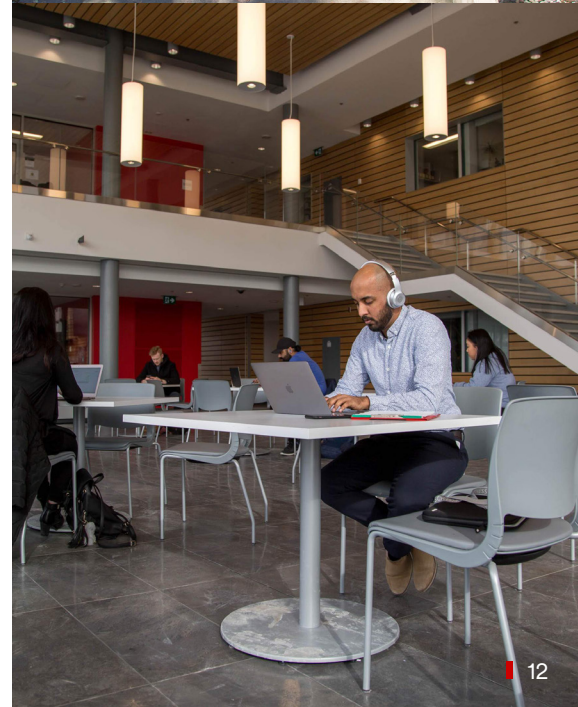
# Accessible, Flexible, and Customizable

- Course delivery modes will offer choice and flexibility with on-campus, online, and blended approaches that are offered year-round.
- Undergraduate degree pathways will be customizable, allowing students to pursue specialized interests.
- Academic student support services will ensure that students, regardless of location, are provided with access to services that are integral to their academic success.
- Course materials will be easily accessible and affordable whenever possible.

## Actions

### In pursuit of this priority, Brock will:

- a. Revise courses and programs to provide greater flexibility, including through reviewing program pathways, core and context credits, co-major requirements, and course sequencing, and reconsidering course durations (e.g. split F courses into P courses);
- b. Develop flexible learning pathways for graduate and undergraduate students that expand transdisciplinary knowledge and collaboration;
- c. Focus efforts on curriculum review and program reimagination to allow for a well-designed mix of on-campus, online, and blended course options, as determined by the alignment between course delivery mode and learning outcomes;
- d. Provide students with greater choice and flexibility when constructing their timetables to support the integration of academic and co-curricular achievement with work and life responsibilities;
- e. Expand the number of courses offered in Spring/Summer terms, providing students who wish to study year-round with meaningful opportunities to do so;
- f. Increase online and blended options for students to access administrative academic supports;
- g. Upgrade and renew the IT infrastructure that supports innovative educational technologies, including the Learning Management System and the Student Information System;
- h. Streamline the processes by which students access learning materials and maximize the use of library resources for course support;
- i. Support the creation, adaptation, and adoption of open educational resources;
- j. Develop courses that support multiple scheduling modes (e.g., module-based and accelerated courses).





## PRIORITY 3:



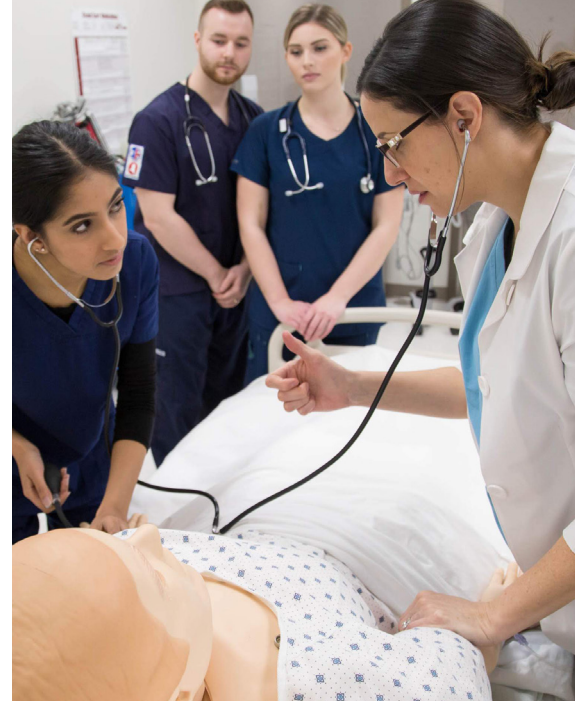
# Supportive and Student-Centred

- Brock strives to foster a strong sense of community and belonging. Rich opportunities are available for students to build social and academic networks, to engage and collaborate with their instructors and classmates, and to connect with the broader community off campus.
- Brock will continue to invest in quality student support services that promote academic success. High-quality support services help students maximize their academic potential in healthy ways.

## Actions

### In pursuit of this priority, Brock will:

- Continue to prioritize student support services, including mental health services, those offered through Brock Sports & Recreation, Student Wellness and Accessibility Centre, Learning Services, Student Affairs, Career Education, the Brock University Library, and Human Rights & Equity through targeted supports for identified areas of need;
- Strengthen the model for academic advising that fosters collaboration, accessibility, and consistency across Brock so that students have a clear service standard and equitable advising experience across programs;
- Enhance and centralize supports for international students on campus to build a greater feeling of belonging to the Brock community;
- Create new mentorship opportunities for all students to ensure they feel supported through their educational journey;
- Create co-curricular and instructional opportunities for graduate students and develop resources that align with student supports to help them achieve their academic, professional, and personal goals;
- Design supports and opportunities for non-traditional learners, including working adults and those with parental responsibilities, to ensure they are well prepared for success;
- Develop a graduate supervisory program for faculty and students to support the further development of collegial and effective mentorship of Brock students.





## PRIORITY 4:



# Equitable, Diverse, and Inclusive

- Brock provides students with opportunities to develop critical and transformative thinking skills in relation to equity, diversity, and inclusion that will highlight how structures of power can create and frame knowledge.
- Brock aims to create responsible, contributing citizens of Canada and of the world. The academic educational experience at Brock will provide students with insights into differences between individuals, including cultures and backgrounds, by fostering a global worldview.
- Brock aims to create a campus culture that is safe, welcoming, and inclusive and that adopts an intersectional approach to advance social justice.
- Brock has an ethical obligation to effectively address the educational calls to action of the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#) and the calls to justice of the [National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls](#).
- As a signatory to the [Scarborough Charter on Anti-Black Racism and Black Inclusion in Canadian Higher Education](#), Brock recognizes that equitable inclusion is critical to academic excellence.
- Brock aims to combat ableism and antisocialism by moving to more inclusive and universal design in learning.

## Actions

### In pursuit of this priority, Brock will:

- a. Review and modernize Brock's core and context credits system to prioritize breadth and maximize opportunities for student exposure to themes in equity, diversity, inclusion, social justice, sustainability, and global justice;
- b. Revise the Degree Level Expectations to support the creation of opportunities for Indigenous education that can be accessed by all students, including a new Indigenous Studies degree and courses with focused Indigenous ways of knowing and being;
- c. Develop supports for educators to Indigenize and decolonize their courses;
- d. Develop resources and supports for educators grounded in anti-racist and trauma-informed pedagogies that sustain inclusive and harassment-free learning environments;
- e. Develop and adopt an ethical framework for educational technologies that ensures the procurement of digital tools do not perpetuate and reinforce systemic inequalities and racial biases;
- f. Embed Scarborough Charter principles of Black flourishing, inclusive excellence, mutuality, and accountability into academic planning, including through the development of a Black Studies program;
- g. Identify and work to dismantle systemic academic barriers experienced by BIPOC, disabled, 2SLGBTQ+, and gender-diverse faculty, staff, and students and develop supports and community that foster inclusive participation and belonging, and that support flourishing;
- h. Implement the relevant recommendations of the post-secondary education standards development committee for a new accessibility education standard under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA).





## PRIORITY 5:



### Future-Oriented

- Brock students will be prepared with the knowledge and skills they need to achieve their goals in their personal, academic, and professional lives.
- Brock will help students become aware of what they have learned both inside and outside the classroom, as well as articulate connections between their university experience and their life goals.
- Brock students will be inspired to be complex and innovative thinkers who have a positive impact on communities locally and globally.
- Students will leave Brock as life-long learners, with a desire to learn more and a motivation to engage in further personal and professional development.
- The dynamic between research and teaching will be engrained in the way Brock approaches student learning to bring cutting-edge research ideas and findings to the forefront of student learning experiences.
- Programs should be intentionally designed to provide opportunities for transdisciplinary learning and to equip students to tackle critical global issues.

### Actions

#### In pursuit of this priority, Brock will:

- a. Support students' academic understanding of global issues of concern (e.g., United Nations Sustainable Development Goals) that will allow them to navigate complexity and thrive in times of uncertainty and challenge;
- b. Expand career education to help learners understand and articulate the links between their education and their career goals in order to support reflection and decision-making about future career and/or academic pathways;
- c. Further develop curriculum-based opportunities for students to translate their academic knowledge and discipline-specific skills into core competencies expressed in language that is meaningful to employers;
- d. Enhance supports for developing our next generation of academic instructors through the delivery of workshops and engagement in scholarship of teaching and learning activities at the graduate level;
- e. Build on the strengths of existing programs and research institutes and centres to extend diverse areas of study that are transdisciplinary;
- f. Research and reflect on student demand, societal needs, research trends, and labour market requirements to develop new and innovative courses and programs in a timely fashion;
- g. Launch Brock's new professional and continuing studies to create life-long learning opportunities for students, graduates, industry, and the broader community;
- h. Engage in a robust review of existing programs to better align with student demand, research trends, and labour market needs;
- i. Identify barriers to student success during the program review process and streamline programs accordingly.



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