



Scott McCain & Leslie McLean Centre for Sport, Business and Health Strategic Research Plan

2024-2027

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Introduction

The 2024 Centre Research Plan (CRP) for the Scott McCain & Leslie McLean Centre for Sport, Business and Health (McCain McLean Centre) at Saint Mary's University represents the future pathway of the organization since receiving a \$3-million gift from Scott McCain and Leslie McLean in 2023. The CRP not only fulfills the requirements of certain funding programs for the Government of Canada (Social Sciences & Humanities Research Council of Canada), but also articulates the McCain McLean Centre's overall research mission and objectives, and outlines actions designed to support them. The CRP exists in the context of the university's Strategic Research Plan (2021-2026) and the McCain McLean Centre Strategic Plan (2024-2027). This CRP provides a framework for backing researchers tied to the McCain McLean Centre in ways that reinforce its prioritized areas of study, provide direction for future resource acquisitions and investments, and raise its public and intellectual profile.

Centre Vision

We strive to be leaders among Atlantic Canadian organizations that use social responsibility as a driver for the practical and intellectual advancement of sport.

Centre Mission

Our mission is to produce, enhance, and deliver research and community engagement initiatives with an emphasis on socially responsible approaches to sport through the lenses of business and health.

Glossary of Terms

- Research: the thorough investigation and dissemination of information within a field of knowledge through data collection and analysis.
- Social responsibility: referring to social justice, equity, diversity and inclusion, accessibility, sustainable development goals, and human rights in the context of sport, health and business.
- Community engagement: collaboration with groups and individuals, communications and outreach, education, student and athlete experience.
- Sport Business: referring to entrepreneurship, leadership, management, marketing, finance, economics, and analytics in the context of sport.

- Health: referring to social determinants of health as well as mental and physical wellbeing in the context of sport.

Research Mission

In concert with the Vision and Mission of the McCain McLean Centre and the Saint Mary's University Research Plan, the Research Mission of the Scott McCain & Leslie McLean Centre for Sport, Business and Health is:

To design, enhance, and deliver research and knowledge dissemination activities on sport through the lenses of business and health in ways that promote an affinity for intellectual pursuits among like-minded researchers of all levels of experience.

Research Objectives

An effective research plan should be precise enough to provide direction, but not so constricting that it lacks the flexibility to react and adapt to significant new opportunities or ideas that emerge over time. The CRP is thus meant to provide a framework that supports the following objectives:

- to promote the McCain McLean Centre Vision and Mission as well as existing research strengths through the identification of Major Research Themes;
- to support the work of as many researchers and community organizations as possible with an interest in sport-related intellectual pursuits with attention to social responsibility through the lenses of business, and health;
- to ensure that students, athletes, and community members have opportunities to participate in and benefit from research that is guided by this plan; and,
- to engage in collaborative interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary research networks and knowledge dissemination activities that advance and develop the Major Research Themes

Assessing Progress

Founded in 1802, Saint Mary's University has modernized to become a primarily undergraduate research institution and the second-largest university in Nova Scotia. Research activity has increased significantly in recent years and continues to grow at a rapid pace; externally sponsored research funding, for example, has more than quadrupled over the last two decades. The McCain McLean Centre, established in 2010 as a Senate-approved Research Centre, has

contributed to this growth. Under the former leadership of Academic Director Dr. Colin Howell, the former Centre for the Study of Sport & Health hosted high-profile research conferences that brought international recognition such as the 41st annual meeting of the North American Society of Sport History (2013) and the “Thinking Outside the Box: Transnational Lacrosse Conference” (2014). Dr. Howell also established The Hockey Conference at Saint Mary’s, most recently hosted again in 2021, which has become instrumental in the advancement of scholarship on ice hockey and the facilitation of connections between researchers and practicing members of the hockey community.

The McCain McLean Centre has been involved in various smaller symposia and lecture series on a continuing basis. In 2017 it was a co-sponsor of a student conference on the Philosophy of Sport organized by Dr. Lisa Gannett, and of an evening celebrating the all-Black hockey line at Saint Mary’s (1970), along with a screening of a documentary on Black hockey, organized by Dr. John MacKinnon. Other research and knowledge mobilization activities have included: three speaker series on ice hockey featuring a mix of scholars and practitioners; a film screening of “The Queen of Basketball” with Academy Award winner Ben Proudfoot and a panel of scholars and athletes; the co-organization of an Indigenous physical activity and leadership symposium with Indigenous Sport & Wellness Ontario in the lead-up to the 2023 North American Indigenous Games; book launches to celebrate the dissemination of research for Dr. Howell’s latest publication on baseball and current Director Dr. Cheryl MacDonald’s work on ice hockey culture; and other individual guest speaker events such as Dr. Charlene Weaving’s talk on trans athlete inclusion in 2024. Currently, the McCain McLean Centre is providing support for the creation of an interdisciplinary edited volume on athlete safety and wellbeing that will be proposed to the University of Alberta Press.

The McCain McLean Centre has had an active Visiting Researcher Program and Senior Research Associate Program, including postdoctoral fellows and other academics working on sport and health research who have used institutional resources to support their work and given back in the form of participation in relevant knowledge mobilization activities. Over the years, scholars have visited the Centre from all over North America, Great Britain, and Europe (including Russia). The McCain McLean Centre also hosted its first Visiting Indigenous Fellow, Ryan Francis, who assisted with research and engaged in various speaking and writing engagements to disseminate information, between 2021 and 2023. Indeed, the McCain McLean Centre has been and continues to engage in community-oriented research initiatives at the local, national and international levels, including work with various sporting bodies such as Sport

Nova Scotia, the Maritime Junior Hockey League (MHL), and a number of sport heritage agencies including Canada's Sport Hall of Fame.

Research projects address a range of concerns, from a federally funded study of sporting borderlands to work on mental resiliency and the development of mental health strategies for organizations. Within the University, the McCain McLean Centre has been especially committed to involving students in data-driven activities, from conference planning and research assistantships to the development of a Here for Peers student mentoring program, the Healthy Teams project, and a division of the Student-Athlete Mental Health Initiative (SAMHI). Lastly, the McCain McLean Centre has also been instrumental in the development of the Certificate program in Health, Wellness & Sport in Society, through which students learn to conduct empirical research of their own.

Consultation Overview: Identifying Major Research Themes through Strategic Planning

Input that informs this CRP was obtained through the McCain McLean Centre strategic planning process through a variety of forums between October 2023 to April 2024. This process included: consultation with other Centre and Institute Directors on campus; focus groups with participants from on and off campus such as faculty, staff, students, current and former athletes, and industry professionals; individual interviews with key stakeholders, including the Associate Vice-President of Research; and feedback from a provisional advisory group with a combination of experience in teaching and research, community outreach, and work in the business of sport and health. The input was aggregated and organized thematically into three major themes.

Major Research Themes

The identification of Major Research Themes is a driving factor in the accomplishment of the four stated Research Objectives of the CRP. The three Major Research Themes outlined below are:

- consistent with the consultation results;
- encompass areas with either a demonstrated history of research strength or a recent growth in development within the Centre; and,

- reflect areas of interdisciplinary and/or multidisciplinary inquiry that provide solid foundations on which to invite the participation of faculty, students, and community organizations near and far.

Not meant to be limited in subject or discipline, these Major Research Themes have been defined to provide direction for remaining connected to the McCain McLean Centre Vision and Mission and for the purposes of ensuring strategic focus for resource investment. With the support of the associated Actions defined in the subsequent section, these Themes are intended to enhance the research success and profile of both the McCain McLean Centre and Saint Mary's University through developing and fostering research network-building and research excellence. Each of the Major Research Themes:

- draws upon previous research themes within the McCain McLean Centre
- reflects the input garnered from the strategic planning process
- seeks to maintain the McCain McLean Centre tradition of knowledge dissemination and community engagement

The Major Research Themes are not presented in any order of priority, and the brief discussions provided are meant as exemplars only, not meant to be exhaustive nor exclusionary. Moreover, the Major Research Themes are not mutually exclusive; rather, they are designed to be mutually reinforcing – allowing innovative scholarship within various disciplines to contribute collaboratively to enhancing the Themes to raise the overall impact of McCain McLean Centre research.

Women in Sport Business

This Major Research Theme reflects the McCain McLean Centre's expansion of its capacity to include a focus on sport business. and build on previous research within the Centre on the development of women's professional sport through both business and sociocultural lenses. At the heart of this theme is the understanding that women (and especially women of colour) have not historically been welcomed or included in sport business in the same ways or to the same extent as men. This includes, but is not limited to, such areas as women in upper management positions, sports administration (i.e. Athletic Directors), women in high-performance coaching and scouting, and the growth and development of women's professional sport. Both the McCain McLean Centre and Saint Mary's University house leading gender scholars and The Sobey School of Business is the largest and most respected Business School in Atlantic Canada.

Research dossiers and course offerings both reflect responsible leadership, social responsibility, social justice, and the experience of women as members of an equity-deserving group. This includes, but is not limited to, women who identify as Black or Indigenous, who identify as 2SLGBTQ+, women with visible and invisible disabilities, single mothers and/or full-time caretakers, and women who are geographic newcomers. The main objectives of this theme are to enhance and deliver research targeted at the following:

- Developing an in-depth understanding of women’s historical and current involvement in sport business
- Increasing and improving the training that is available to women who seek to enter or continue in sport business
- Optimizing the quality of women’s experiences in sport business

Athlete Wellbeing

This Major Research Theme reflects the McCain McLean Centre’s commitment to collaborating with the Athletics & Recreation Department on campus and it also builds on previous research within the Centre on university athlete support and wellbeing through the lenses of history, education, and psychology, among others. Central to this theme is the understanding that both research and formalized programming focused on varsity athletes in Canada is limited in comparison to the United States, with many Canadian athletes electing to leave Canada for the opportunities presented south of the border. This includes, but is not limited to, such areas as: holistic development; studentship training; leadership training; life skills such as the management of time, sleep, physical health, nutrition, stress, and studentship; emotional intelligence, mental health, and mental performance; community engagement and socialization; and social responsibility and cultural awareness education. Existing research in the field consistently demonstrates a particular need to support the development and wellbeing of athletes who identify as people of colour, who identify as 2SLGBTQ+, para-athletes, athletes with intellectual and learning disabilities, and athletes from other countries whose sport has brought them to Canada. Research in this area is not required to focus on university athletes specifically, although the McCain McLean Centre is able to become a leader on this front given the current limited availability of such work. The Certificate program in Health, Wellness, Sport & Society at Saint Mary’s University, which is offered with the support of the McCain McLean Centre, examines this topic in some depth through its core courses and regularly offered

classes such as Sport Psychology and Sport Philosophy. The main objectives of this theme are to enhance and deliver research targeted at the following:

- Developing an in-depth understanding of the historical and current support and development programming that is available to athletes in Canada
- Increasing and improving the support and development programming and resources that are available to athletes
- Optimizing the overall quality of athletes' academic, athletic, and social experiences

Sport Education

This Major Research Theme is meant to be something of an umbrella term for any research and knowledge dissemination that does not fit exactly into the first two Major Research Themes but is still in alignment with the McCain McLean Centre's Vision and Mission. Within this theme, a key research outcome must be accessible education through the processes of transference, translation, or transformation. This is included, but not limited to, research dissemination activities that bring together scholars and practitioners and inform community, such as: conferences and symposia; speaker series; workshops; edited collections and sole-authored manuscripts; knowledge translation papers; and the creation of educational resources. This also reflects the work that will be done in the McCain McLean Centre to support educational development within the Faculties of Business and Arts as they create and expand on business and sociocultural studies of sport. As such, any research on sport education from a pedagogical perspective in alignment with the Centre's Vision and Mission is also relevant. The main objectives of this theme are to enhance and deliver research targeted at the following:

- Disseminating and mobilizing knowledge resulting from research on socially responsible approaches to sport through the lenses of business and/or health
- Contributing to educational development and resources within sport studies from business, health, and sociocultural perspectives
- Optimizing the overall quality of sport education on and off campus

Actions

The following Actions are provided to support the four primary objectives of this CRP generally, and to encourage development of the research strengths in the Major Research Thematic areas specifically. These actions are listed in no order of priority:

- Consult such documents and policies as the Truth & Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action, the National Scarborough Charter on Anti-Black Racism and Black Inclusion in Higher Education, the Department for Women and Gender Equality Act, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Canadian Human Rights Act, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
 - Informs and guides the meaning of social responsibility
- Apply for research funding associated with at least one of the three Major Research Themes to supplement the funding provided by Scott McCain and Leslie McLean
 - Establishes the McCain McLean Centre's track record for research excellence and ensures its sustainability over time
- Hire researchers (e.g. Postdoctoral scholars, Research Fellows, Research Assistants) to expand the McCain McLean Centre's research footprint
 - Expands the Centre's research capacity, advances the Major Research Themes, and provides opportunities to students and early career scholars
- Support external researchers through funding competitions for creative and innovative research and knowledge dissemination activities that align with the McCain McLean Centre's Vision and Mission
 - Raises awareness of the Centre and grow its reach as it seeks to be a leader among Atlantic Canadian organizations with similar goals
- Establish connections with such groups as the Change Lab Action Research Initiative (CLARI), the Office of Innovation & Community Engagement (OICE), and the Sport Canada Research Initiative (SCRI)
 - Helps the Centre explore opportunities for community-engaged research and other forms of community engagement
- Organize data-driven knowledge dissemination activities related to the Major Research Themes such as conferences and symposia, speaker series, workshops, and the creation of edited collections and educational resources
 - Expands the reach and profile of the Centre, establishing it as a leading contributor to sport education among organizations with similar goals
- Interact with the Associate Vice President of Research office (including its Diversity & Inclusion Advisor and Research Grants Facilitator) to stay up to date on institutional research practices, funding opportunities, and socially responsible approaches to research.
 - Maintains Centre relevance, accountability, and opportunities



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