I don’t know why we call them “soft skills.”

They’re certainly not easy to learn, although they are as valuable and necessary as the skills doctors use in surgery, bankers use to assess risk and physicists use to split atoms.

Communication, observation, empathy and logical thinking: These precious and frequently undervalued skills have everyday names.

I prefer to call them “essential skills,” because we all need them every day, though we don’t always use them well. They are the foundational skills that allow us to learn and live and work productively with other people. They are the skills that determine our chances of succeeding. They are the skills of leadership.

These essential skills are the ones most sought by some of the largest, most successful organizations. Those blue-chip employers recognize that their future leaders are people who can understand and communicate about the world around them, who can see the whole picture and find ways to fit into it.

People learn to do this by studying the humanities, the academic fields that have somehow fallen from the nest of subjects considered most worth studying.

Continued to page 3
Dean’s Reflections

The spectre of declining enrolment in Humanities continues to haunt us…Our relevance has been challenged; our research, and its significance, has been questioned; our current degree and degree programmes have been open to criticism and seemingly outrageous inquiry.

So observed the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities towards the end of his term…in 1972! As I enter my sixth and final year in the Dean’s office, I take solace in the words of Sandy McKay, the founding Dean of our Faculty (1968-1973). After all, his handwringing over enrolments and relevance sounds all too familiar. And yet here the Faculty of Humanities still stands, turning 50.

Still standing. Still supporting excellent researchers to engage and interrogate the ideas, texts, images and material cultures that have shaped the human experience. Still supporting researchers who share their passion and skills with students. Still supporting researchers to speak out, write and publish in many venues and create works that, by deepening our understanding of the past and present, open pathways to the future.

Still standing, but not standing still. Just look inside this newsletter: you will find philosophers engaged in thinking through the ethics of genetic modification, communications specialists exploring what big data in our cities means for privacy, our Asper Chair in Communications helping find ways to keep aging adults mobile and creative, and linguists exploring the science of language acquisition and loss.

Just look at two of our newest research centres. The Centre for Ancient Numismatics involves classicists working with the McMaster Museum of Art and radiation scientists to analyze ancient coins, furthering our understanding of ancient civilizations. The Centre for Networked Media and Performance offers a venue where multimedia artists and communication scholars can explore the ways in which our networked digital world enables exciting new forms of expression, communication and collaboration.

Just look at our newest educational initiatives. We have launched a new PhD in Communication, New Media and Cultural Studies, an Integrated Business and Humanities B. Comm. program, and new certificates to recognize undergraduate student competencies in leadership and cross-cultural literacy, essential French, international engagement or the ethics of technological innovation.

Just look at our new faculty members. We welcomed eight scholarly leaders over the past two years: a medical ethicist who interrogates the ethics of health research among vulnerable groups such as children (Ariella Binik, Philosophy), a historian who explores the expression of Indigenous nationhood and identity in North America through sport (lacrosse) and occupation (ironwork) (Alan Downey, History), a sculptor who challenges our experience of familiar objects (Carmela Laganse, Studio Art), a media artist who deploys sound, moving images and other media to explore the tension between the life-giving and destructive potential of water (Chris Myhr, Multimedia), a literary scholar deepening our reading of Latin elegies (Mariapia Pietropaulo, Classics), a cognitive scientist helping us to understand the connections between how we speak and how we comprehend languages (Daniel Pape, Linguistics), a philosopher examining the social role of language and convention (Megan Stotts, Philosophy), and a critical data specialist who currently is helping develop a set of ethical and other guidelines for researchers using social media (Andrea Zeffiro, Communication Studies).

Just look at our new spaces. In 2017-18, we celebrated the long anticipated official opening of L.R. Wilson Hall for the Humanities and Social Sciences, with its splendid new active learning classrooms and performance teaching spaces, including the black box theatre and the wonderful concert hall that was the focus of the official opening.

The Faculty of Humanities, then, still stands after 50 years because we are never caught standing still. You see, the truth is -- and I think Sandy McKay knew it too -- the handwringing never lasts. Concerns about enrolments and the value of our teaching and research soon have Humanities doing what we do best. We reflect critically on our practices, preserve what needs to be preserved, and change what needs to change. 🦁
Skills for an age of disruption

Since the Second World War, the pragmatic, empirical disciplines of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), as well as business, have risen to prominence. They have been hived off the traditional, all-purpose liberal arts education, which was designed to prepare students for full participation in the adult world.

The active listening, critical thinking and collaboration skills developed in a liberal arts degree are vital to contemporary professions.

The tide now appears to be turning, as it becomes clear that essential skills enable us to adapt and thrive in our rapidly changing world and bring the technical skills to life.

RBC Royal Bank — a corporation known for its business successes — took a yearlong, cross-country look at what Canada’s job market will be like in the 2020s. Its report this spring, Humans Wanted: How Canadian youth can thrive in the age of disruption, offered some compelling projections, including the following:

1. Increasing demand for foundational skills such as critical thinking, coordination, social perceptiveness, active listening and complex problem-solving.
2. The Canadian economy is expected to add 2.4 million jobs over the next four years, all of which will require this new mix of skills.
3. Global competencies such as cultural awareness, language and adaptability will be in demand.
4. Virtually all job openings will place significant importance on judgment and decision-making and more than two thirds will value an ability to manage people and resources.

The report confirms what many business leaders have been saying for years: Educators should be leaning harder on the humanities to build those foundational skills in graduates — not just through degree programs in the humanities, but also by incorporating more humanistic teaching into STEM and business education.

Liberal arts rule a digital world

Investor Mark Cuban says the employment market of the near future will demand fewer hard skills since technical tasks are increasingly being performed by computers. Instead, he says, we’ll need more people who can put information into human context.

Steve Jobs, the late co-founder and CEO of Apple, once said: “It is in Apple’s DNA that technology alone is not enough — it’s technology married with liberal arts, married with the humanities, that yields us the results that make our heart sing.”

Recent books such as Scott Hartley’s The Fuzzy and The Techie: Why the Liberal Arts Will Rule the Digital World and Christian Madsbjerg’s Sensemaking: The Power of the Humanities in the Age of the Algorithm, make similar points very powerfully.

Still, we keep still hearing the same question from parents and even from humanities students themselves: “What can you do with a humanities degree?”

Empathy, tolerance for ambiguity, wisdom

It can be hard to convince these parents and students that the humanities are the training they need.

You might be writing a history essay, for example, but you’re developing important broader skills by doing it.

You’re gathering information from different points of view, you’re using it to marshal an effective argument and to present it effectively in writing, with supporting evidence.

The fact that the content is history doesn’t matter in the end: You’re developing skills in research, critical thinking and written communication.

A study conducted across five medical schools in the United States found that trainee doctors who were exposed to the humanities had higher levels of positive personal qualities such as empathy, tolerance for ambiguity, wisdom, emotional intelligence, self-efficacy and visual-spatial skills. Exposure to the humanities also reduced levels of some components of burnout.

A valuable investment

We won’t need as many coders, but we will need people with digital literacy. Many STEM jobs will be automated. A disruptive culture needs people who can adapt.

It takes time to cultivate the essential skills that enable adaptation. Learning to work collaboratively and to understand new perspectives takes time.

Not everyone is willing to wait, nor do they necessarily trust the outcome of a humanities education. Many employers still recruit for degrees and credentials that apply specifically to the field. They may say the “soft skills” are important, but how much of a priority do they really make of them?

The skills that result from studying the humanities develop obliquely, and that may have caused us to lose our sense of their value.

Yet these are highly transferable skills. They are valuable and necessary today. They are worth making the investments of time and trust, because they will be worth even more in the years to come.

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McMaster’s new home of the liberal arts, L.R. Wilson Hall, was brought to life last night with a full-scale production incorporating artistic and cultural performances, experiential learning and the work of students, alumni, faculty and staff.

The celebration ceremony held in the building’s leading edge concert hall was essentially a “living lab” showcasing the skills of more than a dozen students in performance and others who were working production backstage.

“IT’s inspiring to know that so many people and organizations are willing to invest so much in giving generations of Mac students better opportunities to excel and lead in creating a Brighter World,” said McMaster Students Union president Chukky Ibe, ’17, who is also a poet and playwright.

Behind the scenes, a student production team made up of technicians and a voiceover artist employed the skills learned in the Theatre and Film Studies – Organizing Performance Environments course taught by Patrick Brennan.

McMaster Students Union president Chukky Ibe, ’17, who is also a poet and playwright, performed a spoken word piece called Astronaut and thanked benefactor L.R. Wilson and the Ontario government on behalf of students.

“It’s inspiring to know that so many people and organizations are willing to invest so much in giving generations of Mac students better opportunities to excel and lead in creating a Brighter World,” Ibe said.

L.R. Wilson Hall, which opened for classes in 2016 and was officially celebrated Monday, is a light, spacious, global-quality home for the social sciences and humanities at McMaster. It was designed to foster creativity and the vitality of the contemporary liberal arts.

Participating in the building’s official opening ceremonies were students in the string quartet from the McMaster Chamber Orchestra course, an opera performance by alumnus and tenor Joel Ricci ’09, and a theatre performance excerpted from the upcoming major student production of Women and Servants by playwright Lope de Vega. Directed by School of the Arts associate professor Peter Cockett, the drama segment, set in 17th century Madrid, featured three student actors.

Adrian and Ascension Harjo, a father and son performance team from Six Nations presented Feathers N Fringe.

Social Sciences dean Jerry Hurley said students love the new building and use it as “their lounge, their living room, their office and their coffee house.”

It is also an important research facility, he noted.

“Co-locating more than a dozen multidisciplinary Humanities and Social Sciences research centres and institutes here has given us the opportunity and inspiration to upgrade their facilities and create a critical mass of investigation and innovation that is already paying dividends,” Hurley said.
**All the world’s a black box**

A black box theatre is exactly what it sounds like: a big, black room with four walls and very little else.

No elaborate gilt, no plush velvet chairs, no sweeping curtain. No balconies or orchestra pit.

And no stage.

That’s precisely the point – and a plain black box can be a valuable teaching tool for the school’s Theatre & Film Studies students, says McMaster theatre professor Peter Cockett.

“A proscenium stage forces a ‘normal’ theatre relationship between the actors and the audience, which is that the actors are raised up and the audience is sitting quietly in the dark, passively receiving whatever the actors say on stage,” he explains. “In the black box, we’re able to renegotiate that relationship and propose new ways that the artists might connect with the audience.”

Fourth-year students in the Theatre & Film Studies program get to explore the dramatic and design potential of the new black box theatre in L.R. Wilson Hall.

“We have this idea that you’re born a certain way, and you stay that way – but identity’s not stable. It’s always shifting, and it’s affected by things both inside you and outside – even things you haven’t experienced, like historic events. It’s about how my personal identity has been constructed, and how it’s continued to grow and change in so many directions.”

Working with third-year students in the program, who develop the shows’ sound, lighting, set and costume designs, the fourth-year students present mostly devised, or collective, theatre works — pieces that are created through the collaboration of directors, actors and designers.

“There’s an incredible amount of variety in the shows this year,” says Cockett, who points out that this is only the second year that the Honours Performance Series has been in the black box theatre. “We have one show that is a dance and theatre hybrid that deals with PTSD and sexual abuse. Another is a comic piece that incorporates magic realism. In our new space, we have the freedom and the flexibility to explore that variety.”

One piece that fully explores the potential for “immersive” theatre within the black box is Jamie Milay’s “because i am not a boy or a girl,” which uses multimedia, including installation art, looped sound, video art, poetry and lighting to explore the issue of identity.

“It’s an autobiographical piece about how my identity is fluid,” they explain. “We have this idea that you’re born a certain way, and you stay that way – but identity’s not stable. It’s always shifting, and it’s affected by things both inside you and outside – even things you haven’t experienced, like historic events. It’s about how my personal identity has been constructed, and how it’s continued to grow and change in so many directions.”

That fluidity is reflected in Milay’s staging, which is a “promenade” — with no seats in the theatre, the audience moves around the space, interacting with the performance in a much more intimate way than with a conventional theatre show. All four walls – as well as the centre of the room – are used in the performance, surrounding the audience within the action.

Milay, a student in both the Theatre & Film Studies and Multimedia programs, has always been attracted to the power of storytelling.

“Theatre is an empowering medium,” they say. “You invite an audience in, you tell them stories, they leave and reflect on it, and maybe come again. It’s terrifying, but cool.” 📚
A look inside McMaster’s Centre for Advanced Research in Experimental and Applied Linguistics

McMaster’s Centre for Advanced Research in Experimental and Applied Linguistics – casually known as ARiEAL – is a “dry lab”: no one’s mixing chemicals, no one’s dissecting anything and no one is carefully pipetting samples onto a petri dish.

Instead, there are rooms of computers – some furnished with EEG systems to evaluate the electrical activity in the brain, some equipped with eye-tracking devices to gauge how people read, some with software that assesses word recognition and second-language learning, some that simply analyze reams and reams of data.

Of course, that’s not counting the hair washing room.

“When they do an EEG, they use a gel to improve conductivity between a person’s head and each electrode,” explains Chia-Yu Lin, the Centre’s manager of development and research. She’s holding up an electroencephalography (EEG) cap, which looks like a swimming cap covered in small, flat metal discs. “The gel gets injected under each electrode, and it gets all over people’s hair. So we have a place where they can wash up – we’ve got shampoo, conditioner, hair dryers, and hair products.”

“Working together, we’ve been able to solve some problems that we never would be able to solve on our own, with a much bigger impact.”

ARiEAL is one of McMaster’s newest research centres, started in 2016 under the direction of John Connolly, the Senator William McMaster Chair of Cognitive Neuroscience and a professor in the department of Linguistics and Languages. The Centre, which moved into a new facility in L.R. Wilson Hall in September 2017 and houses five different labs, brings together researchers from a variety of disciplines to investigate topics around language, cognition and brain function.

“Here, we’ve got different people in different fields all in one place,” says Connolly. “We give them the opportunity to get chatting and that leads to ‘we should work together’ moments. After all, we’re working on a ‘platform organ’: the brain. It does everything – so even though our research areas may seem unrelated, they’re actually not.”

ARiEAL’s members and collaborators include partners from the faculties of Humanities, Engineering and Health Sciences, as well as research partners from the University of Western Ontario and HELP University in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The Centre also has Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with the Haskins Laboratories at Yale University and the University of Turku’s department of Psychology and Speech-Language Pathology in Turku, Finland, which help facilitate research collaboration and cross-pollination between the institutions.

ARiEAL also recently formalized another significant partnership with Words in the World (WoW), a partnership grant emphasizing a research training initiative funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). This formal partnership solidifies ARiEAL’s collaboration with WoW in advancing the next generation of research leaders.

Specific research areas include word recognition and speech comprehension, bilingualism, first- and second-language acquisition, coma, concussion and other brain injuries – among many other topics. Those types of far-ranging projects, as well as the interdisciplinary approach to research, are key to the work that ARiEAL does.

“At some point I realized that if you’re going to go after really big problems that are useful to humanity in general, you have to be interdisciplinary – you can’t just look at things from a single perspective,” says James Reilly, one of ARiEAL’s members and an electrical engineering professor who specializes in signal analysis. “Working together, we’ve been able to solve some problems that we never would be able to solve on our own, with a much bigger impact.”

Students also benefit from ARiEAL’s focus on interdisciplinary work. Rober Boshra, who is working on a PhD in biomedical engineering jointly supervised by Connolly and Reilly, says that he’s learned things through ARiEAL that never would have come up in a traditional research setting.

Boshra was one of three McMaster trainees recently named to the Vector Institute for Artificial Intelligence’s postgraduate affiliate program.

“From theoretical syntacticians to eye-tracking experts to socio- and psycholinguists – I’ve learned a lot from being able to bounce ideas off so many people with so many different approaches,” he says. “I’ve actually audited classes in linguistics, which has turned out to be surprisingly useful for someone with a background in computer science. When you work with the brain, there’s so much to answer – but it’s enabled me to think about things differently.”
Collaborating across an ocean

McMaster’s Centre for Advanced Research in Experimental and Applied Linguistics (ARiEAL) has partnered with the University of Turku’s Department of Psychology and Speech-Language Pathology in Finland to collaborate on research on reading and acquiring second languages.

Victor Kuperman, an associate professor in McMaster’s department of Linguistics and Languages, and Raymond Bertram, from the University of Turku, are working together on a variety of projects, largely using eye-tracking technology: using a computer and a camera to measure how someone’s eye moves around on a page of text — how long it stays on an individual word and whether it skips words or goes back, for example.

“Where the eyes are, how they jump from place to place, how long the jumps are, how long the eyes stay in certain positions — this all tells you something about the reading process,” explains Bertram. “What it tells us, exactly, is what we are trying to investigate.”

Kuperman and Bertram are focusing much of their work on adult learners of English. For example, they’ve shown that after reading a word that’s spelled wrong, Finnish and German adults who are learning English have a harder time reading the word in the future, even when it’s spelled right, and also have difficulty spelling the word correctly, even if their spelling was reasonably good. (Kuperman has shown this in native speakers of English as well.) People who were more proficient in English were affected less than those whose proficiency was less secure, because experience makes mental representations of words more stable and more immune to errors.

There’s a very definite practical application to their work.

“With this kind of research, what we’d hope to do is come up with recommendations for adult literacy instructors as well as L2 [second-language] instructors,” says Kuperman. “English and Finnish are beautiful natural controls as two languages — because they’re so different, they give us a way to find out what is universal to both, and what is specific to each language.”

These types of partnerships are mutually beneficial, according to Kuperman, facilitating the exchange not only of ideas and collaboration on research, but also of graduate students, postdoctoral fellows and faculty.

“The support that we get from McMaster allows us to invite collaborators and allows students to run parallel experiments in two different labs on two different continents,” explains Kuperman.

And being exposed to speakers of other languages is particularly important for monolingual students, Bertram points out — especially those who are studying linguistics.

“It’s often the case that English students only know English, but you get a better meta-linguistic awareness when you have knowledge about other languages,” he says. “Comparing different languages, like English and Finnish, or English and German, gives students a better understanding of how languages could work. This is an important lesson that they’ll take away from being involved in the types of projects that we’re working on together.”
MELDing ESL instruction with cutting-edge research

MELD – the McMaster English Language Development diploma – is a program with a difference.

On the surface, it looks much like the English bridging programs offered by many other institutions: two semesters of English instruction designed for international undergraduate students who meet the academic requirements for a program but whose scores on international standardized tests aren’t high enough to meet the university’s English language requirements.

Students who enrol in MELD are given a conditional acceptance to the McMaster program of their choice – as long as they successfully complete the MELD program. They take courses that are designed to get them comfortable with using English for academic purposes, and get elective credits they can then apply when they enter an undergraduate program.

And that’s where most of the similarities stop. That’s because MELD isn’t just about learning English – it’s also focused on learning about how people learn English, and using that information to improve the program itself and contribute to scholarship on language learning.

“The original vision of the program was to have it linked to an academic department,” explains Anna Moro, a professor in the Linguistics and Languages department and MELD’s program director. “That was so we could incorporate research into the program from the beginning – learn about this particular type of second-language learner and use that research to continuously assess and adapt our instruction. I don’t know of any other program like ours.”

So far, the research has focused on reading ability, and whether it improves over the time spent in the MELD program – assessments that aren’t generally a part of these types of bridging programs. Moro’s research team, co-led by Daniel Schmidtke, a postdoctoral fellow, worked with 35 volunteers from the 2015-2016 cohort on a pilot program to assess whether their reading got better after two semesters in MELD.

Schmidtke used eye-tracking technology – which provides a visualization of where someone’s eye moves on the page as they read, as well as how long they spend on each word – to gauge students’ reading behaviour, assessing how long they spent reading passages of varying complexity, as well as the likelihood that they would skip over words as they read. Students were tested at the beginning and end of the program.

Schmidtke found that students improved their reading proficiency most if they’d had high speaking scores on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), one of the most common tests for English proficiency, prior to enrolling in MELD. As well, the more their vocabulary expanded over the course of two semesters, the more their reading comprehension scores improved.
Since then, MELD researchers further tested other cohorts, carefully measuring vocabulary knowledge, phonological processing skills (knowledge of the sound patterns of a language) and reading comprehension. Students are now provided with the results of their assessments to demonstrate their progress over the course of the program.

The research has also started to inform the program’s activities: MELD introduced a speech clinic this year, for example, to help students learn how to better wrap their mouths around unfamiliar sound combinations. The program also expanded its weekly book club sessions and added weekly structured conversation circles, both of which ran at capacity this year.

“There’s lots of research from psychologists and linguists on reading and reading development,” explains Moro. “We know a lot less about adult readers who are at a certain level. Our students aren’t your average second language learners — they’re aspiring for academic use, and context, and that’s very different from someone who might learn a second language because they want to travel for the summer.”

It’s not just the focus on research that makes MELD different, though. Moro knew that she wanted to take the program beyond language learning and incorporate ways to help students navigate an unfamiliar culture as well as build a sense of community.

“We aren’t interested in assimilation, but acculturation — helping students navigate this community and this cultural context,” she says. “We also want them to build a connection to the university and develop a real sense of place.”

This is partly because Moro has seen that students’ success — moving out of the MELD program and progressing through a standard undergraduate program — is associated with a feeling of connection both to each other and to the wider university.

To that end, students in the MELD program participate in a mandatory number of co-curricular activities, both with other MELD students and within the larger university community. The program also has an embedded mentorship program, where upper-year undergraduate students can get elective credits for mentoring a MELD participant. The program’s centralized facility, housed in L.R. Wilson Hall, has been instrumental in heightening students’ sense of community.

MELD offers free tutoring and the services of writing coaches to students who may need extra support, but it’s not all about academics.

“The students have questions on how to talk to people in everyday life,” Moro points out. “We’ve run a series of workshops on conversational best practices — how to talk to a friend, what’s appropriate when you first meet someone, and how to talk to your doctor or your landlord. The students guide what we offer with the questions they ask.”

Students have also taken the initiative to hold their own community activities, forming a MELD student association and holding a talent show this year.

Moro’s “full-service” approach to ESL instruction is definitely working. For the 2014-2015 cohort — the first students through MELD — there was a 100 per cent retention rate from their first year of regular undergraduate studies into their second, and a 97 per cent retention rate into third year. That first cohort will graduate next year. The same first-into-second-year retention rate was true for the 2015-2016 cohort.

“I’m not sure that other programs like this track retention rates as closely as we do,” explains Moro. “But for us, it’s how we gauge whether our program is working — we’re interested in doing things that are in the best interests of the students, the university and the program. We prioritize delivering quality and we want to do what’s right for our students.”
Three-time Mac grad establishes bursary for Humanities student
By Allyson Rowley

For Rosanne Gasse, all roads seem to lead to McMaster.

She grew up in Dundas and followed in her older brother’s footsteps when she enrolled at Mac. Originally a science major, she quickly realized her heart was in English. She fell in love with Chaucer, specialized in medieval literature, and went on to receive her honours BA, master’s and PhD from McMaster.

She moved to Manitoba in 1988 for a faculty position at Brandon University. The McMaster connection stayed with her: Established in 1889 by the Baptist Union of Western Canada, Brandon University was originally Brandon College – and affiliated with McMaster University between 1910 and 1938. (Nowadays, Brandon University’s main student residence is named McMaster Hall, while McMaster has Brandon Hall.)

“And the first piece of mail I received when I moved to Brandon was a letter from McMaster asking for money,” Gasse recalls with a laugh.

Clearly, she didn’t mind too much. A loyal annual donor, Gasse has given back for many years in support of McMaster students in financial need. “I want to help others have the same opportunities I had,” she says.

For some time, she had been thinking of establishing a student award. Once again, the road led back to McMaster. Gasse has never forgotten that she received a donor-funded bursary while a student here.

“I really appreciated the financial support – it was incredible. I wouldn’t be here if I hadn’t received that,” says Gasse, now a full professor in Brandon’s Department of English and Creative Writing. The medievalist in the department, she teaches a wide range of courses from classical literature to the Latin language to world literature. “I tell people I teach everything from 1500 BCE to 1500 CE!”

Gasse has established the Don and Lois Gasse Memorial Entrance Bursary in memory of her parents. Although neither had the opportunity to pursue university degrees, both her parents believed in the importance of education. Gasse established the award in 2017, the 40th anniversary of her father’s passing and the 20th anniversary of her mother’s.

The bursary will support students entering Level I in the Faculty of Humanities who demonstrate financial need, with preference to Indigenous students.

Although Gasse has no Indigenous heritage, she’s clear why she chose to focus the award in this way. “There’s a considerable Indigenous population in Manitoba,” she says. “This is my recognition of what has taken place in the past, and my gesture toward reconciliation.”

Gasse serves as book review editor for the Canadian Journal of Native Studies. She credits that work with helping to open her eyes. “It’s time for healing.”

She also hasn’t forgotten her mentor and thesis supervisor, Laurel Braswell-Means, who retired from McMaster in 1995. “She helped foster my love for medieval literature,” says Gasse. “It’s important to remember the support that you received.”

Why consider a donation to McMaster? “Knowing someone is on your side gives a tremendous sense of support,” says Gasse. “Every little bit helps.”

To learn more about the impact of donations on McMaster students, go to https://impact.mcmaster.ca/
McMaster philosopher leads the creation of principles to guide genetic modification
By Wade Hemsworth

What if deliberate genetic modifications could prevent mosquitoes from transmitting devastating illnesses such as malaria, dengue fever and Zika, saving millions of lives? What if the same modifications also turned out to have unanticipated harmful impacts?

These and other questions are at the heart of the debate over gene drive, the promising but controversial science of overriding natural selection by pushing preferred genetic traits through a population to create certain results, such as breeding out the capacity to transmit a virus, or breeding out the capacity to reproduce altogether.

The science is advancing quickly, and there is international concern about making sure it proceeds transparently, responsibly and beneficially.

McMaster philosopher Claudia Emerson, director of McMaster’s Institute on Ethics & Policy for Innovation, is the lead author of a major new paper in the journal Science that introduces a set of guiding principles for moving forward with such research. So far, 13 major funders of gene drive research have committed to adopting the principles.

Emerson and her fellow authors from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Foundation for the National Institutes of Health in the US and the Wellcome Trust in the UK are hoping that others will commit to upholding the same guiding principles.

The principles are being established at a time when some opponents, including environmental and anti-GMO groups, are calling for such research to be banned outright.

The authors hope that broad uptake of the principles will help the public to understand that funders and investigators are committed to working out the risks and benefits of gene drive before field-testing and deployment.

“One of the things we’ve learned is that as well as something might function in a laboratory environment, some level of uncertainty remains as to how it will function in the natural environment,” says Emerson from her office at L.R. Wilson Hall. “The benefits still seem to be greater than the risks, which is why we want to proceed with the research, but there are obviously groups who feel quite nervous about this and who are unconvinced by the data. They feel it’s crossing a boundary that shouldn’t be crossed.”

Emerson hopes the principles will show doubters that gene-drive funders and researchers understand public concerns, and assure the public that such research is conducted ethically and transparently.

“We need to keep going. We need to find out more. Banning the research would actually be a terrible idea,” Emerson says.

As funders continue to sign on to the common set of principles, she explains, it helps create a community of practice that adheres to the highest scientific and ethical standards.

“Scientific and technical advancement happen so quickly that the science seems to be ahead of the ethics, and sometimes the regulations,” Emerson says. “All of these things have serious ethical and societal implications. There is a need to think pre-emptively about the implications and to do something to stay one step ahead of the science, or at least in step with it.”

Here, from the Science paper, are the guiding principles for sponsors and supporters of gene drive research:

**Advance quality science to promote the public good**

The pursuit of gene drive research must be motivated by, and aim to promote, the public good and social value. Funded research shall embody the highest quality science and ethical integrity, consistent with the current best practice guidance set by the research community and relevant decision-making bodies.

**Promote stewardship, safety, and good governance**

Researchers and sponsors are stewards of science and the public trust. It is imperative that good governance is demonstrably shown in all phases of the research, and especially in relation to risk assessment and management. This requires compliance with applicable national and international biosafety and regulatory policies and standards.

Research conducted with respect and humility for the broader ecosystem in which humans live, taking into account the potential immediate and longer-term effects through appropriate ecological risk assessment, is a hallmark of both good stewardship and good governance.

**Demonstrate transparency and accountability**

Knowledge sharing is not only essential for the advancement of science, but for transparency to foster public trust in emergent technologies. The timely reporting of results and broad sharing of data shall be the norm in gene drive research, consistent with the tradition of openness established in its parent communities of genetic and genomic science. Measures of transparency and accountability that contribute to building public trust and a cohesive community of practice will be supported.

**Engage thoughtfully with affected communities, stakeholders, and publics**

Meaningful engagement with communities, stakeholders, and publics is critical for ensuring the best quality science and building and sustaining public confidence in the research. Funded research shall include the resources needed to permit robust, inclusive, and culturally appropriate engagement to ensure that the perspectives of those most affected are taken into account.

**Foster opportunities to strengthen capacity and education**

Strengthening capacities in science, ethics, biosafety, and regulation is essential for enabling agile and steady progress in gene drive research globally. Opportunities to partner, educate, and train shall be supported throughout all phases of the research, from the early stages to deployment. Strengthening capabilities within countries for testing and deploying the technology is essential for informed decision-making. 🌐
McMaster researchers explore the intersection of privacy and smart city technology
By Sara Laux

Imagine a city with park benches that not only track how many people use them but also act as public wifi hotspots. Where sensors can track traffic flow and adjust traffic signals accordingly. Or one where an app tells you where the closest open parking spot is.

“Smart cities” incorporate technology like sensors and the internet of things – networked garbage cans that let collectors know when they’re full, for example – to provide data that can be used to make decisions around service provision and governance.

Cities around the world are embracing smart technologies to increase efficiency, improve environmental impacts and provide more targeted, effective services for residents. Ambitions run high: Singapore, arguably the world’s “smartest” city so far, aims to connect “Everyone, Everything, Everywhere, All the Time.”

So where does privacy fit in to a city where connectivity is the ultimate goal? How do municipalities ensure that the type of surveillance that characterizes smart cities is applied equitably and with appropriate oversight?

And what do Canadians think about all this?

That’s precisely what political science PhD candidate Angela Orasch and Sara Bannerman, Canada Research Chair in Communications Policy and Governance, want to find out.

The pair have received a grant from the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada through its Contributions Program to study the privacy implications of some of the smart city technologies used in Canada’s largest cities: Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Edmonton and Ottawa.

Working in partnership with the Samuelson-Glushko Canadian Internet Policy and Public Interest Clinic (CIPPIC), Orasch and Bannerman are creating a web resource outlining the types of smart city technologies in use, as well as a set of recommendations that will balance privacy rights with the benefits of having a networked city. In addition, they’re planning to conduct a national survey to gain a better understanding of Canadians’ awareness of privacy issues.

“The intersection of privacy with smart cities is a brand-new area of study, so this is really a preliminary investigation into what the potential privacy concerns might be with different technologies,” explains Orasch. “It’s a complex issue, because, jurisdictionally, it falls into many different areas. Commercial data is a federal concern, but the policies around smart cities will be made at the municipal or provincial level. We don’t know yet what we’re going to encounter.”

For Bannerman, who is an associate professor in the department of Communication Studies and Multimedia, the project fits into a wider research program she’s started on platform regulation – investigating how Canada regulates online platforms like Netflix, Facebook and Google.

With partnerships between government and private companies – like the one between Sidewalk Labs, a division of Google’s parent company Alphabet, and Waterfront Toronto, to build a new smart neighbourhood on the city’s eastern waterfront – already underway, that regulation is going to extend beyond the online sphere.

“Both governments and platforms like Google and its parent Alphabet, and other private companies, are very much involved in constructing the privacy landscape for smart city technologies,” she says. “The ability to collaborate across faculties, as I’m doing with Angela, is a huge advantage because it brings multiple layers of expertise to bear on the project.” 🦁
Grandma’s got game
By Sara Laux

When Paula Gardner and her now-PhD student, Stephen Surlin, tested out their new interactive software with seniors at Toronto’s Baycrest geriatric hospital a couple of years ago, they got concerned after 20 minutes.

The software was working well – a little too well.

“We were using an interface that allowed the seniors to either digitally paint or create a piece of music by moving their hands,” explains Gardner. “A number of them with fairly low mobility were so enthralled with the platform that they just kept playing and playing. We had to urge them to stop so they could rest – we were worried they’d be sore the next day!”

Potential muscle aches aside, encouraging seniors to move more is exactly the aim of Gardner and Surlin’s Movement and Biometric Feedback Platform, which they’re hoping to develop further, with the help of a Catalyst grant from the McMaster Institute for Research on Aging (MIRA) and its Labarge Centre for Mobility in Aging.

The ABLE project (Arts Based Therapies Enabling Longevity for Geriatric Outpatients) brings together researchers from five McMaster faculties to develop technologies that will enhance the cognitive, physical and emotional health of frail older adults.

Working with geriatric outpatients at Hamilton’s St. Peter’s Hospital, the project aims to use technologies such as a Kinect 2, biometric inputs, data projector, projection screen and speaker system to encourage seniors to be more active. Participants can create a piece of music using the movement of their hands (“It sounds a little like Ravel,” says Surlin), paint a digital picture, or play a game.

Why is helping seniors improve their mobility so important? For frail seniors – those with physical or cognitive limitations – being able to move easily can mean the difference between maintaining a level of independence and succumbing to outright disability or worse.

“There’s a connection between physical health and cognitive health,” explains Gardner. “This platform can be used with specific rehab exercises, or just to encourage movement generally and, in doing that, can also help reduce social isolation and enhance mood through physical activity.”

Adding music, visual art or gaming components to the movement interface makes the experience more pleasant for the user – meaning that it’s more likely to be used regularly, an important consideration in encouraging mobility. Multi-player functionality means that older adults could play specifically designed video games with their grandchildren or caregivers, giving them a vital social connection.

A key priority for the team is using a “design thinking” approach to the project – using feedback from older adults during testing to improve the platform until it best meets the needs of the participants.

“This kind of co-design is key to making sure the experience using the technology isn’t stressful,” explains Gardner. “We also don’t want to make assumptions about what seniors do and don’t want to do. We designed one iteration of the game – where the player used their hands like wind to blow leaves around – and got feedback that it was really boring. The participants wanted more of a challenge.”

The Catalyst grants specifically encourage cross-faculty collaboration in researching mobility in aging. The members of the research team are:

- Gardner, a multimedia design and communications scholar, and McMaster’s Asper Chair in Communications (Faculty of Humanities)
- Alexandra Papaioannou, a geriatrician and executive director of the Geriatric Education and Research in Aging Sciences (GERAS) Centre (Faculty of Health Sciences)
- Courtney Kennedy, an epidemiologist and associate scientific director of GERAS (Faculty of Health Sciences)
- Patricia Hewston, an occupational therapist and post-doctoral fellow with GERAS (Faculty of Health Sciences)
- Laurel Trainor, an expert in perception, movement and music and director of McMaster’s LIVELab (Faculty of Science)
- Rong Zheng, a specialist in capturing and analysing data from wearable sensors and vision-based systems (Faculty of Engineering)
- Amanda Grenier, Gilbrea Chair in Aging and Mental Health (Faculty of Social Sciences)

Working in collaboration allows the individual researchers to combine their expertise, creating a team that produces results greater than the sum of its parts.

“It has been eye-opening to work with colleagues with expertise in Gerontology, Rehabilitation and Computer Science,” says Gardner, the project’s lead investigator. “Together, we’re better able to understand the client population and their immediate needs in detail. We can then quickly craft experiments that will lead us to solutions to meet the needs of this large and unserved population. We can only meet this challenge as a team.”

Paula Gardner
Asper Chair in Communications
“Your investment transformed my life.”

That’s just one of the sentiments expressed by the more than 100 students who have written notes of thanks to the provincial government for its $45M investment in McMaster’s L.R. Wilson Hall.

Three of the letters were read aloud at Queen’s Park this week by McMaster alumnus and MPP Ted McMeekin, who plans to share the notes with Premier Kathleen Wynne.

McMaster students had originally advocated for provincial support of the building through a letter-writing campaign which saw hundreds of letters sent to then-Premier Dalton McGuinty.

Wilson Hall’s opening was officially celebrated in October 2017 when the building was brought to life with a full-scale production incorporating artistic and cultural performances, experiential learning and the work of students, alumni, faculty and staff.

The building serves as the home for Social Sciences and Humanities at McMaster, and was designed to foster creativity and the vitality of the contemporary liberal arts.

More than a dozen multidisciplinary research centres and institutes from both Faculties are co-located there, creating a critical mass of investigation and innovation.

In addition to the Province’s support, L.R. Wilson Hall was made possible through a $10M gift from McMaster’s Chancellor Emeritus, Lynton “Red” Wilson, a long-time supporter of the University and the liberal arts.

Wilson announced a separate, $2M gift to help boost the liberal arts during the building’s opening celebration. That gift established the Socrates Project, a two-year campus-wide pilot project drawing on the University’s strengths and expertise in liberal arts education and research.

Concerts at McMaster

Concert Hall, L.R. Wilson Hall, McMaster University

**Friday Evening Concert ticket information:**
General Admission $20 | Seniors $15 | Students $5
or SAVE BIG and purchase a subscription for all concerts!
Subscriptions: General Admission $60 | Seniors $45
Free admission for McMaster Music Program Students

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION VISIT:** sota.mcmaster.ca
905.525.9140 ext. 27671

**Friday Evening Concerts**

**Nagata Shachu**
(Japanese Taiko Drums)
Friday, October 26, 2018 | 8:00 p.m.

**Piano Chameleons**
(Piano Duo)
Friday, November 23, 2018 | 8:00 p.m.

**Johannes Linstead**
(Spanish Guitar)
Friday, January 25, 2019 | 8:00 p.m.

**The Joy Lapps Project**
(Steel Pan, Guitar, Drums, Keyboard)
Friday, March 8, 2019 | 8:00 p.m.

**Tuesday Lunchtime Concerts**

**Santerias**
(Vocals, Guitar, Bass, Drums)
Tuesday, October 16, 2018 | 12:30 p.m.

**Cris Derksen**
(Classical Cello with Traditional Indigenous Music)
Tuesday, November 13, 2018 | 12:30 p.m.

**Zoltan Kalman**
(Clarinet and Piano)
Tuesday, February 26, 2019 | 12:30 p.m.

**Alexander Panizza**
(Piano)
Tuesday, March 12, 2019 | 12:30 p.m.
Students in experiential class re-make history

By Sara Laux

In 1968, Canadians elected Tommy Douglas prime minister and brought his seven-year-old New Democratic Party into power, ushering in an era of strengthened powers for organized labour, stricter pollution controls and expanded rights for French-speaking Canadians.

At least, that’s what would have happened if Jennifer Tunnicliffe’s 2V03 history class had their way.

Dubbed “Re-making History,” 2V03 is an experiential history course designed to encourage both history and non-history students to engage with Canadian history – traditionally seen as a “dry, dull field” — in a different way.

“In every term this course is taught, we pick a different moment in Canadian history,” explains Tunnicliffe, who is a Wilson Assistant Professor with McMaster’s Wilson Institute for Canadian History. “This semester, we selected the 1968 federal election, with Trudeaumania and the ‘Just Society’ and all the excitement around that. A big focus is to get students not just to look at 1968 from the perspective of 2018 – 50 years later — but to try and get a sense of what it was like to be in 1968.”

To do that, the class was divided into three groups at the beginning of the year — one group that represented the social democratic left, one centrist and one socially and politically conservative. Their job: to understand and eventually communicate the domestic and global issues of the day from the perspective of their group, regardless of their own political leanings.

“A lot of history courses cover a really broad time period,” says Alicia Davis, a second-year student in the Justice, Political Philosophy and Law program. “This one is completely different because of the participation, and how involved you get in the time period that you’re studying. We’ve had a chance to get a really in-depth understanding of the issues that were specific to Canada in the ’60s.”

The culminating activity for the class was two-fold: students had to prepare an individual project that explores a particular issue from their assigned perspective. While traditional papers and academic posters were certainly acceptable, Tunnicliffe says students were encouraged to get creative.

“Students did art installations, wrote music, created campaign videos and built dioramas,” she says. “We’re trying to show them that it’s possible to present this info in many different ways.”

As well as their individual projects, students also had to represent their group’s perspective in a mock election debate — after which the students and audience voted in a mock election.

Preparing for the debate involved a lot of digging through primary sources — materials from the time that could inform how the students presented their issues.

“For the debate, we looked at the NDP party platform of 1968,” explains Jordan Zivanovich, a second-year honours history major who was representing the NDP in the debate. “We also looked at the platforms for the other parties as well as bills that the Liberals introduced under Lester B. Pearson. We’re going to try and show how issues like Indigenous rights, Quebec sovereignty and oil in the west have been neglected, and the negative impact that’s had on Canada.”

That research paid off. Although the 1968 Liberals may have swept to power on a wave of Trudeaumania in real life, the McMaster NDP was the clear winner in 2V03’s alternate reality.

For Ian McKay, McMaster’s L.R. Wilson chair in Canadian history and the person who introduced the course to McMaster last year, 2V03 is a chance to prove that Canadian history is “not dull as dishwater, but a vibrant, exciting subject.”

“This kind of class is geared towards students who want to do things, rather than just read about them,” he said before the debate started. “This course invites you to engage in a debate, to engage with conversations with fellow students — to throw yourself right into it. That’s very different from reading 15 different history books and memorizing facts for an exam. As you can see from the energy in the room, it’s got a completely different vibe.”
Dr. Paula Gardner, McMaster’s Asper Chair in Communications, completed a successful term as President of the International Communication Association. As part of her work as President, she participated in mentoring sessions at the first regional conference in Africa, advising junior scholars on how to advance their research agendas.

Carly Ciufo, a PhD Candidate in the Department of History is the first recipient of the new H.V. Nelles Graduate Award. The fellowship offered through the Wilson Institute for Canadian History helps students travel abroad, enabling them to reach archives and institutions with the research materials that they need to complete their thesis.

Dr. Bonny Ihbawoh, Acting Director of Peace Studies, was invited to the launch of the ‘Nelson Mandela: Struggle for Freedom’ exhibition at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg. The invitation recognizes Dr. Ihbawoh’s scholarship in the field, and his ongoing work taking McMaster students to conduct research at the Winnipeg museum, supported by the Asper Foundation.

A five-day series of master classes, instructional sessions and collaborative guided work in media arts was hosted by Department of Communication Studies and Multimedia professors, Drs. Paula Gardner and David Ogborn. This Node 9 collaboration represents a project undertaken by the new Centre for Networked Media and Performance. Support from the Socrates Project allowed the workshops to be offered free of charge to the public, in the Black Box theatre, Dr. Gardner’s Pulse Lab and Dr. Ogborn’s Networked Imagination Lab.

Among the five books shortlisted for the 2018 RBC Taylor Prize in Literary Non-Fiction was Dr. Daniel Coleman’s Yardwork: A Biography of an Urban Place. In honouring the book by the English and Cultural Studies professor, the jury observed that “This is a masterpiece of nature writing, reimagining civics and possibilities, as Coleman surveys what he understands is ‘a holy land right here’ behind his house and beneath his feet.”

The Canadian Public Relations Society has awarded Dr. Terry Flynn from the Department of Communication Studies and Multimedia the Mentor of the Year Award. Dr. Flynn has been a 30-year plus member of the organization and was praised by three nominees as “being the embodiment of what it means to be a mentor.”

McMaster’s Socrates Project has begun its inaugural fall season with a wide spectrum of events designed to spark debate and illuminate ideas. The first event of the season featured a free performance by Tobique First Nation artist Jeremy Dutcher, just days before he was awarded the prestigious Polaris Music Prize. The Socrates project is being driven by a $2-million investment from Chancellor Emeritus Lynton “Red” Wilson.

Nearly 300 students were recognized for their academic and research achievements including more than 250 students named to the Dean's Honour List at the Faculty's 37th Annual Award Assembly. Students and their families were addressed by 2012 Communication Studies and Theatre & Film graduate Alyssa Lai about her experiences as a student and were treated to a piano performance by Jong wan Steven Hur, winner of the Reginald Bedford Award for Excellence in Piano Playing.

Dina Hamed started her undergraduate experience in Sociology but found her calling in the Studio Art program. Dina’s contributions to the cultural and intellectual life of the university while earning the highest cumulative GPA in the graduating class of 2018, were recognized when she was awarded the Dean’s Medal for Excellence in the Humanities at spring convocation.

Trekking solo across 4,000 kilometers of arctic tundra in northern Canada, Adam Shoal's story has been mentioned in national news media on more than a few occasions. The PhD candidate in the Department of History added the McMaster Alumni Arch Award to his long list of achievements during a ceremony in the L.R. Wilson Concert Hall on May 31st.