

PRESIDENT'S REPORT TO COUNCIL

September 2024

Dear colleagues,

Welcome back to a new academic year. I hope summer gave you an opportunity to rest and I am looking forward to our work together over the coming months. We had many exciting things happening on campus over the summer and I am happy to share some of the highlights in this September report.

I know we are all proud that the Huskies Football team won the Homecoming game against the Calgary Dinos on September 13th in front of more than 8,700 fans. The energy at Griffiths Stadium was terrific with students, staff, faculty, alumni and donors in the stands to cheer on our team.

I am pleased to report that our enrolment this fall is stable with a slight bump of 0.8 per cent. We have seen some decline in our international student enrolment due to the cap imposed by the federal government earlier this year and we will have more information to share on the full impact later this fall.

Thunderchild First Nation and USask MoU

In August, I was delighted to join Chief Delbert Wapass to sign a Memorandum of Understanding on behalf of USask with Thunderchild First Nation. The intent of the MoU is to support collaboration on common interests such as mentorship, research, and supporting Indigenous youth.

The signing of this MoU is a credit to the Office of the Vice-Provost Indigenous Engagement. Dr. Angela Jaime led its development and will work closely with colleges and schools—in particular the kihci-okâwîmâw askiy Knowledge Centre, along with the College of Agriculture and Bioresources, the College of Education, and the School of Environment and Sustainability—to implement shared initiatives with Thunderchild to fulfil the intent of the MoU.

USask at the Olympics

USask had several students and alumni completing in the Paris Olympics and Paralympics this summer, notably bringing home four bronze medals.

- Kinesiology student Rylan Wiens won bronze in the men's 10-metre synchronized diving event, alongside his diving partner, Nathan Zsombor-Murray. It was the first time Canada has ever reached the podium in this event.
- Education alumna Shelby Newkirk won bronze in the women's 100m backstroke S6 Para-swimming final,
- Agribusiness alumna Julie Kozun's women's sitting volleyball team won the bronze-medal match against Brazil.

- Kinesiology alumna Dr. Keely Shaw (PhD) won bronze in the women’s 3,000-metre individual pursuit C4 Para-cycling event.

USask was also represented in the Paris Paralympics by current education student Jacob Wassermann (Para-rowing) and arts and science student Ashlyn Renneberg (Para-athletics women’s javelin), as well as education alumna Nikita Ens (Para-swimming) and former Huskie women’s basketball player and kinesiology alumna Erica Gavel, who served as an athlete ambassador with the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) at the Paralympics.

In the Olympic competition, USask was represented by sociology student Margo Erlam (women’s diving) and education student Sydney Carroll (artistic swimming), along with alumna and former Huskies track and field star Michelle Harrison (100m women’s hurdles). Other USask connections at the Olympics included Huskies track and field coach Jason Reindl (Harrison’s coach in Paris) and Huskies women’s basketball coach Lisa Thomaidis and support staff member Connor Jay with Germany’s Olympic women’s basketball team.

Giving Day 2024

September 10th was Giving Day at USask. We were pleased to start the day with the announcement of a generous gift from Jonathan (BEng’86) and Chennene (BA’86) Wright of \$100,000. Throughout the day, more than 400 donors from the USask community, across the country and around the world contributed, raising \$319,446 for the Be What the World Needs campaign. Credit to Cheryl Hamelin, VP University Relations and her team for organizing a positive and successful day.

Research Highlights

Each month, the OVPR produces [Discovery Digest](#), highlighting major research achievements at USask. There are many excellent stories to share; below are a few items of note over the summer.

[USask receives record \\$417M in awarded research funding in 2023/24](#)

USask set an institutional record in 2023/24, attracting \$417 million in awarded research funding. This amount is the highest-ever awarded in a single year in the university’s history and is a testament to both the quality and quantity of research being conducted across campus.

[USask-led international partnership for sustainability education receives unprecedented funding](#)

Dr. Maureen Reed (PhD), professor in School of Environment and Sustainability (SENS), is the principal investigator on a multinational education project that received more than \$500,000 CAD from the Spencer Foundation in the United States. Titled “Co-designing Transdisciplinary Sustainability Education,” this project is meant to offer training internationally that draws on the collective knowledge of community partners and academic researchers to support learners inside and outside of academia. The goal is to work together to address key sustainability challenges. This is the first time that a USask-led project has received this grant funding from the Spencer Foundation.

[Farm Credit Canada announces \\$5 million investment into GIFS at USask to accelerate breeding and innovation for Canadian agriculture](#)

Farm Credit Canada (FCC) is investing \$5 million into the accelerated breeding program of the Global Institute for Food Security (GIFS). The newly named FCC Accelerated Breeding Program at GIFS will drive sustainable advancements in agricultural productivity across Canada. Accelerated breeding combines technologies such as genomic selection, speed breeding, bioinformatics and computer simulation to increase the rate of genetic gain for crop and livestock breeding programs, delivering new products into the hands of producers two to three years faster and improving agronomics, quality and disease resistant traits.

USask's VIDO awarded NIH contract to develop critical models for global research

The Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization (VIDO) has been awarded a major new research contract in the global fight against infectious diseases. VIDO has received an Indefinite Delivery/Indefinite Quantity (IDIQ) contract under the pre-clinical models of infectious disease program by the United States' National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). VIDO was one of four international awardees and the only Canadian organization selected as part of the program which further demonstrates VIDO's scientific excellence, robust quality systems and strong ethical research practices. The seven-year IDIQ contract's ceiling is \$146.3M USD.

New USask research into aging-related cell damage receives CIHR funding

Dr. Jeff Dong (PhD), assistant professor in the Department of Biochemistry, Microbiology and Immunology in the College of Medicine, recently received more than \$1 million from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) Project Grant program for his work exploring the mechanisms behind how cells in the brain and nervous system are damaged by age – leading to the formation of chronic lesions in the brain or the spine that are part of multiple sclerosis (MS). By better understanding that mechanism, Dong believes his group can learn ways to better address progressive MS, which is the type of MS that becomes increasingly debilitating with age.

USask researchers explore sustainable solutions for farmers

Dr. Christy Morrissey (PhD) is leading a project to help farmers use marginal lands, which are often not profitable for producers, in a way that benefits both them and the ecosystem. Her project recently received \$3.9 million over four years from the National Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) and a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) sustainable agriculture research initiative (SARI) grant. Morrissey and her colleagues are using more than 800,000 acres of crop yield data from farmers' combines to find sustainable solutions that will benefit both producers and the Prairie ecosystem.