



University of Saskatchewan: Charting an institutional path for internationalization

Strategy for North-South engagement

The University of Saskatchewan (U of S) has come far from its beginnings as an agricultural college in 1907. Now it offers more than 200 academic programs, and includes five professional colleges, as well as cutting-edge research facilities such as the Canadian Light Source (CLS), Canada's national synchrotron science facility.

In 2003, the university launched *Globalism and the University of Saskatchewan*, a document which defined internationalization for the institution. After experimenting with both a centralized and a decentralized approach, the U of S based its strategic plan on a blended model that includes the International Research Office, International Student and Study Abroad Centre and the International Office. All three units support internationalization within the professional colleges.

A recent comprehensive review of the U of S's internationalization resulted in a set of specific recommendations, including that a position of vice-president, international, should be created, and that "premier partnerships" should be formed. These are envisaged as partnerships based on broader institutional interests and involving more than one of the colleges.

¹ For more information, see: www.aucc.ca/upcd.

Implementation: Leveraging success

The concept of premier partnerships sets a clear institutional focus to choose partner countries and partner institutions abroad. Often, successful partnerships that are scaled up from one college to include another help create a broad, institution-wide, interdisciplinary approach. Several U of S missions abroad in recent years have involved deans, who are seen as key players in achieving success in international development initiatives. In fact, faculty members firmly believe that deans need to have field experience to fully understand the mechanics of international development collaboration. Deans are therefore strategically included in the early stages of international development partnerships.

Mike Grevers, professor emeritus, now retired from the College of Agriculture and Bioresources, was director of a successful collaboration with Hawassa University in Awassa, Ethiopia in sustainable rural agriculture development that began in 2004. This project, administered by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), and funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) through the University Partnerships in Cooperation and Development (UPCD)-Tier 2 program¹ developed a strong graduate program in agricultural sciences at the masters level, and provided research funding, training and supervision for 25 Ethiopian graduate students. A multidisciplinary approach has since been introduced to the project and now includes

faculty from paediatrics, nursing, medicine, nutrition and pharmacy. Dr. Grevers says this partnership gives Ethiopian faculty members the opportunity to increase their research capacity, and enriches the experience of U of S, including opportunities for faculty and student exchange.

The institution's senior administrators also actively promote a tripartite delegation model for overseas initiatives with university, provincial and industry representatives where possible. For example, representatives from the U of S participated in a mission to Kazakhstan along with the provincial minister of trade and representatives from Saskatchewan's Cameco, one of the world's largest uranium producers. As a result, a memorandum of understanding has been signed to support training, research and development in Kazakhstan's mining sector. Karen Chad, Vice-President of Research at U of S, describes this mission as a new model for internationalization: "This program fulfills Kazakhstan's needs and increases the internationalization of the curriculum for both faculty and staff. Further, it allows Cameco to access the human resources they need."



A UPCD project between the University of Saskatchewan and Hawassa University in Ethiopia helped local farmers improve their capacity for soil management.

Photo: University of Saskatchewan

Innovative features and programs

Another AUCC-administered UPCD program-Tier 2 that began in 1998, first trained a group of Mozambicans at the U of S's community health and epidemiology department, linking them with community-based organizations in the province to learn how to deal with a variety of health issues. On their return to Mozambique, they became part of a project known as Building Healthy Communities

through Partnerships and Training, working with the Mozambican ministry of health (MoH). Part of the project's focus includes strengthening the Massinga Centre for Continuing Education in southern Mozambique.

In 2001 these efforts were scaled up to further strengthen the Massinga Centre through direct funding from CIDA. The Centre has now been identified by the MoH as its first national site in Mozambique to pilot the improvement of knowledge, attitudes, and skills of health workers through continuing education. The MoH now wants all participants of other teaching and community health programs to spend time in Massinga to learn the U of S methodology.

The College of Medicine's Making The Links program also draws on this experience and began in 2004 to train culturally-aware doctors. "This is not medical tourism, this experience is intended to be transformative for our students," says Ron Siemens, M.D., clinical assistant professor in the department of pediatrics. The engagement in Mozambique has also been extended to other colleges, including nursing, dentistry, and pharmacy.

In First Nations communities in Canada as well as in Mozambique, students learn from traditional healers. Further, both environments challenge students to practice with fewer resources, allowing students to acquire cultural sensitivity. Pammla Petrucka, associate professor with the college of nursing, sees the learning opportunities, gained from First Nations communities in Saskatchewan and extended to developing countries, as a continuum: "Aboriginal traditions validate multiple ways of knowing, which serves you well when working in a developing country. In both contexts you have an ethical responsibility to listen to the local community."

A number of committees composed of students, faculty and staff guide the College of Medicine's approach to internationalization, including the internationalization committee, the social accountability committee and the global health committee, which is working to develop a certificate in global health. The core principle for international engagement is reciprocity. Murray Dickson, professional affiliate at the College of Dentistry, describes the aim of international engagement as "not just what you know, but how you care about people and society in general."

Thomas Elis, director of research at the Canadian Light Source underscores the establishment's great potential

to contribute to research for development. The facilities offer the opportunity to examine particles at the nano level. One example of a possible application focuses on arsenic levels in water in Bangladesh, showing that selenium, a useful nutrient, can counter the effects of arsenic.

The U of S has taken large strides in internationalization, using a multidisciplinary approach to advance international development collaborations. Faculty members' strong personal commitment to the transformative value of internationalization will continue to bring benefits to the both local and international community.



Karen Chad, vice-president of research.

Photo: University of Saskatchewan