

**CANADIAN UNIVERSITIES
AND A NEW INTERNATIONALISM**

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Remarks by

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Internationalism is of its nature about crossing borders. Yet paradoxically nothing makes me feel more Canadian, more circumscribed, than when I go across an international border. At such moments one feels one's national identity very intensely. One may experience other emotions too—guilt, perhaps, if you didn't tell the exact truth on your customs declaration, or boredom, or impatience at yet another bureaucratic obstacle; but of necessity one is reminded of the particularities of place of birth, citizenship, home address—the details that make us unique and different from everyone else. Borders can shape identity, but they do so, often, by constraining it – pushing it into pre-established molds, and creating a sense of difference.

Difference is something we learn to fear. I'm not speaking of biological instinct here, but rather the fear of different cultures, languages, and beliefs that we acquire through upbringing, education, and social environment. We may be born with an

innate fear of the dark; but we are not born hating or fearing people of a different colour or religion—sadly, such feelings are nurtured in us through the thousand influences that are at play during our childhood and adolescence.

The fears that can be generated by difference are at work in our own country. Canada prides itself on social understanding, on promoting diversity and multiculturalism; yet we have the recent experience of the Bouchard-Taylor Commission in Quebec before us, which suggests that many people in that province regard immigrants with suspicion and distrust. We know that for many immigrants, the door on employment or educational opportunities is only slightly ajar, and complaints about excessive “accommodement” of those who arrive with different customs or beliefs are rampant.

The rest of Canada should not feel superior to Quebec in this regard, though to my vast annoyance, it often does. British

Columbia is perhaps the most multi-racial society in the country, yet its history is sadly reflective of racism and chauvinism, largely directed at minority groups of colour from east and south Asia.

And uncomfortably close to home, there is the history of Canada's treatment of its indigenous peoples, a history marked by betrayal and by the sense of moral and social superiority underlying colonial expansion. That is a history that continues to dog us, and that we are attempting – often feebly – to expiate today.

We cannot afford to ignore such failures; and as the world shrinks through technological advances in transportation and communications, we are learning—slowly but surely—the importance of overcoming our differences in an attempt to change the pattern of suspicion, hostility, and aggressive conflict that has characterized the relationship between states and between peoples over recorded history.

For we are beginning to recognize that the nations and peoples of the world face common enemies—enemies of their own creation, perhaps, but nevertheless enemies that we must work together to overcome: environmental degradation and climate change; the pollution of our atmosphere by excessive use of fossil fuels; the destruction of the ozone layer and the consequent increase of cancers around the world; the world-wide epidemic of AIDS; the spreading gap between rich and poor, a gap often created by oppression and the abuse of human rights; threats posed by the drug culture to social order in many countries; the depletion of our oceans by over-fishing—this list could go on and on, but I think my point is clear. These are enemies that, whatever their origins, know no national borders.

Retreating within our borders and shutting out everyone from elsewhere—that may seem like a natural response to such threats to our well-being; and indeed, we are seeing some countries adopting this kind of fortress mentality. But that is precisely the

wrong thing to do. Only by opening our borders, by inviting new ideas and sharing our discoveries, can we hope to find solutions to the problems we face together.

In the development of such solutions, post-secondary education has an enormous role to play. In the western world, universities have become the principle engines of discovery in almost every field, and it is no exaggeration to claim that if we are to find the solutions to the social, economic, and environmental problems that loom over us, it is our universities that will almost certainly provide them. Government has recognized this, pouring billions of dollars into research infrastructure over the last decade and making it possible for Canadian universities to recruit researchers of the highest calibre.

The result is that we no longer worry so much about the “brain drain,” because many of our best researchers now choose to stay in Canada, assured of the kind of support that earlier they

might only find abroad. And equally satisfying is the fact that Canadian universities are today attracting some of the best scholars from around the world. This is the kind of intellectual internationalism that has always characterized universities at their best: the search for knowledge should never be circumscribed by borders or nationalities

But the universities' role is not limited to research and discovery. We also have a responsibility to disseminate knowledge, the skills necessary to apply that knowledge, and the ethical principles governing its application. That responsibility does not stop at our borders. In its strategic planning document, *Trek 2010*, UBC has acknowledged the importance of internationalization as a policy in higher education. In part, the text reads:

In a world where countries are increasingly interdependent, we share a common responsibility to protect and conserve

natural resources, promote global health and well-being, and foster international cooperation.

In line with this principle, UBC has set out to establish an international presence through exchange agreements, overseas recruitment drives, and research partnerships with foreign universities. Between 1997 and 2007, for example, we tripled the number of international students in our graduate and undergraduate programs, from just 2000 to almost 6000; and we now have robust exchange agreements with many foreign universities under our student mobility plan, Go Global.

Cynics might observe that international students pay higher fees, and bring much-needed revenue to cash-strapped institutions. There is some truth in such a view—a pretty strong connection exists between enrolment and revenues, as everyone here understands; but at UBC—and indeed, at most other Canadian universities that I am familiar with—the pursuit of international

students is linked to a recognition that, if we are to gain credibility and recognition for our teaching and research, we must become part of the network of learning that encompasses the globe. And in large part that means fostering diversity and global awareness at home, by attracting good students from abroad. One means of fostering diversity is to bring Canadian and international students together through the experience of residential life: since 1993 UBC has established agreements whereby students from Ritsumeikan University in Japan, Korea University, and Tec de Monterrey in Mexico live in dedicated residences with an equal number of Canadian students for the time that they study here. Next year we will open another such residence in partnership with Hong Kong University. Foreign students help to “internationalize” us internally, which is a real benefit to our classes by enriching debate, and to our professors and students by opening up new perspectives.

Successful though such measures may be, much more must be done to open up Canadian universities to scholars and students from other countries. The fact is that we *need* to internationalize if we are to achieve and maintain the standing we aspire to as research institutions. Our research productivity is already dependent on international input: a bibliometric analysis of Canadian research publications across a wide range of fields shows that currently 40% of the papers by Canadian authors have foreign co-authors, many of them graduate students, with BC leading Canada in this regard.

So the internationalization of our campuses is in our own best interests. Other countries have also recognized this truth faster than us, and are doing more than Canada to attract foreign graduate students. Australian universities receive funding support to enable them to recruit abroad, and successful applicants receive visas quickly. A number of American, British, and Australian universities are setting up English-language branches in countries

like China, Singapore, and India; Nottingham University has campuses in China and Malaysia, and New York University is establishing a campus in the Emirates.

I do not favour building campuses abroad, because I do not think that in most cases they will attract the best scholars; nor will they help to develop indigenous talent. In fact, in many cases, they are a new form of colonialism. Yet such initiatives do raise the international profiles of the participating universities, and enable them to participate more easily in international research networks. I prefer to work through consortia and to create robust partnership arrangements with sister universities in other countries. Here at UBC we have ventured rather hesitantly into foreign markets: we have an active Asian-Pacific Regional Office serving UBC students and alumni in Hong Kong, and we are participants in the APRU consortium of leading Asia-Pacific Universities and in Universitas 21, a consortium of research universities that has sought to develop some joint programmes aimed at a global

market, and strong exchange arrangements for faculty and students.

Overall, however, Canadian efforts in internationalization have not been impressive. In 2005, 30% of graduate students in the US were non-US citizens. For the same period in Canada, only 18% of graduate students were non-Canadian citizens. The figures for international visa-holding doctoral students as a percentage of all doctoral students in Canada have fluctuated widely, from a high of 25% in 1993 to a low of 15% in 2001. By 2004 the number had recovered somewhat, to 23%. But remember that this was in the immediate aftermath of September 11th – when access to the dominant US schools was limited. We utterly failed to seize that moment of opportunity. But other countries did not fail.

The figure for MA students is not very encouraging either, although there was an increase from 8% in 1995 to 14% in 2003. The inverse problem is also serious for Canada. We are,

unfortunately, far below what we as a country should be doing to fund international study, sending only about 2.2% of our university students abroad.

What should we do to improve these numbers? Most Canadian universities have been attempting to increase funding support for their foreign students, though we are still well below the levels of scholarships and bursaries offered in the U.S. Work restrictions on international students and their spouses have been relaxed, as have residence requirements, for which I think that we should all be grateful to the federal government. I hope that the 2008 Budget announcement creating Vanier Scholarships will signal a new recognition of the need to compete aggressively for outstanding international graduate students. The Canada Graduate Scholarship top-up to allow Canadians to spend time outside Canada is also welcome, though it is as yet little more than a pilot program. I also hope that we—that is, Canadian universities as a group—can persuade the federal government to fund international

recruitment programs, similar to the practice in Australia and the UK.

Important as such measures may be, more is at stake here than merely our success in the international competition for new students from abroad. Through their research, particularly in the social sciences and humanities, as well as through foreign exchanges and partnerships, Canadian universities can—and sometimes do—exert an influence on the shaping of national policy. Governments at both the regional and federal level look to universities to provide them with the kind of insights that can help direct our political and economic relations with other countries.

More concretely, the increasingly international focus of our universities strengthens our nation's links with potential overseas partners. Canadian-educated Chinese or Korean business people can provide powerful connections with growing Asian markets that might otherwise remain closed to Canadian enterprises. Such links

have far-reaching implications for the health of our own economy by making it possible for us to participate in growth and development abroad.

And exporting our expertise is not limited to the areas of business or industry: in one form or another Canadian universities are already working with international agencies to improve the health and living conditions of citizens in many countries around the world. Just one example of this kind of international cooperation is offered by an initiative based in UBC's Centre for International Health, which is helping to coordinate a project that links universities and research centres in Ecuador, Canada, Cuba, and Mexico for the purpose of helping Ecuador learn to manage its emerging environmental health needs. You could all name other such projects, I am sure.

These kinds of projects reflect a growing sense that universities have a strong role to play in furthering the goals of

social justice, both at home and abroad. At UBC we speak somewhat idealistically of educating future “global citizens” who will work towards the attainment of a sustainable and equitable future for all. In practical terms this means encouraging the development of courses and programs emphasizing global awareness and civic engagement. At UBC a thousand students each year volunteer their services through our Learning Exchange, helping marginalized members of our downtown east side develop their skills and enjoy learning opportunities that would otherwise be denied them by their circumstances.

University teachers and researchers are increasingly conscious that they and their students have the power to make things better—that their work can actually resound in the world beyond the laboratory, the library and the classroom. In the past some colleagues used to argue that the university should remain detached from the hurly-burly of everyday life, that like the three Chinese figures in Yeats’s poem “Lapis Lazuli” we should sit on

the mountain and look down “on all the tragic scene” as if we had little or no connection with it; today many of my colleagues recognize a different truth, that we must immerse ourselves in that world and help it overcome its tragedies.

It is becoming more and more important for the countries of the world to transcend their own borders and collaborate on environmental, economic, and social issues that would otherwise pose a real threat to global health and well-being. I include in such collaborations the creation of global norms in the area of human rights: it is becoming increasingly important that states work together to establish the moral and legal foundation for a body of international law capable of protecting people against threats to their rights by corrupt, weak, or indifferent regimes. If the spirit of internationalism is to have any real meaning, countries must learn to build on shared understandings of what is right and acceptable, the value of public education, the importance of free speech in a free society, and so on.

Universities are founded upon such ideas, and exist to preserve and disseminate them. It is to our universities that we should look for leadership in promoting a new spirit of internationalism; they can play a significant role in helping to bring this about by developing joint research projects with overseas partners, by promoting the ideals of global citizenship through focused programming, by encouraging domestic students to take greater advantage of the many opportunities offered by international exchanges, and by increasing the number and value of graduate scholarships for international students.

Crossing borders can mean simply the act of peering briefly into the way other people live, “faire du tourisme,” a journey that always ends where it began. Or it can mean a more difficult voyage, one in which we transcend social or political barriers to offer others the benefits of our research and learning, and to learn

from their work—thus making it possible for us to effect positive changes in *their and our* lives.

Thank you.