

Building bridges from B.C. to Brazil; Ties being developed through student exchanges will provide a foundation for future relationships that benefit all

Vancouver Sun

Wed May 2 2012

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Section: Issues & Ideas

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In our rapidly evolving global context, Western nations, including Canada, are asking the question "To whom does the future belong?" We watch with wonder, and not a little envy, as emerging economies spread their wings and take off, seemingly overnight. Countries that have struggled with poverty and development are becoming economic miracles, blessed with stratospheric growth and a new-found confidence to compete in complex industries with established world leaders.

Brazil is one of these new powerhouses.

With a population of more than 190 million, Brazil is set to become one of the world's top five economies. It is pursuing a bold future, and a key part of its strategy is a commitment to invest significant resources in higher education and research, particularly in so-called STEM disciplines: science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

And what of Canada's interest in this? We must not be content to sit back, admiring the determination of our southern friends. Rather, this is the time to generate strong new partnerships with Brazil that will secure future opportunities for British Columbia, and Canada.

That is why we have travelled to Brazil as part of a delegation of 30 university presidents, members of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada – a delegation led by Gov.-Gen. David Johnston and a number of high-level officials including Gary Goodyear, minister of state for science and technology.

Included in that group are five B.C. institutions: the University of B.C., the University of Victoria, Simon Fraser University, Kwantlen Polytechnic University and Royal Roads University. Mitacs, a national not-for-profit research organization with head-quarters at UBC, is also part of this mission.

This is an unprecedented effort by Canada and we are driven by a conviction to be "fast out of the gate" in building solid bridges that foster real, long-lasting benefits to both countries.

You will no doubt hear that we will be busy signing many agreements with the country's leading universities to advance research collaborations and student exchange, and, of course, these are important.

But the true bedrock from which these bridges will be built is authentic people-to-people relationships. Personal connections provide durable bonds that ensure two-way flows of knowledge, innovation and business opportunities. Personal bonds not only cross borders, but are much more sustainable through time and inevitable difficulties.

This week we are already seeing the fruits of our efforts as we witness the Brazilians welcoming our initiatives to build relationships with their institutions and industry. In fact, we expect to see students and researchers flowing back and forth to British Columbia in the very near future.

One concrete example is the announcement in Sao Paulo of more than \$10 million in new funding from the governments of Brazil and Canada, various provinces, universities and Mitacs. With this innovative program, 450 of Brazil's best undergraduate students will come to Canada on summer internships over the next three years. They will also have the chance to come back through a novel national graduate fellowship at Canadian universities, including our own. This is the Mitacs Globalink program which has already recruited star students from India and China since 2009.

Brazil is showing inspiring foresight by launching the visionary Science Without Borders program which will provide 100,000 scholarships to Brazilian students to study in the world's top post-secondary institutions. The sheer scope of this initiative is an indicator of Brazil's ambition. During our trip, Brazil has committed to targeting 12,000 of these scholarships for study in Canada, and we are positioning B.C. to be a major recipient.

We all win when dynamic and innovative countries, institutions and people get closer to each other. UBC has long made it an important educational goal to be a destination for the world's best students and researchers. They infuse campus life and research with fresh insights, perspectives and approaches. They forge international friendships that benefit global society, and collaboration that fosters global prosperity.

The connections made this week will help nurture nascent Brazil linkages to B.C. universities that already include a variety of exchange agreements and growing university-industry research collaborations in areas of importance to B.C., such as mining engineering and visual analytics.

To be sure, there is a lot of competition to get Brazil's attention as the world wakes up to the opportunities it offers. The high-profile state visit led by our governor-general is a strong step in the right direction.

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