

Global and Community Engagement at McMaster: Where FWI has brought us, and where we are going

The *McMaster University International Compendium*, compiled by an International Activities Ad Hoc Committee, appeared on campus in 2009. For various reasons this important “operational tool for internal collaboration and enhanced program awareness domestically and worldwide”¹ achieved neither the circulation nor impact it deserved, and our international activities continued as before: significant and valuable to be sure, but lacking both a widely-shared understanding of their breadth and variety, as well as a comprehensive, deliberate strategy for the institution as a whole.

A second edition will shortly be issued, but this time the appearance of the *Compendium* will coincide with significant changes in the administrative structure that supports international activities at McMaster. The appointment of a new Associate Vice-President (International Affairs) was the first of these to be announced, and more announcements will follow. While the 2009 document could be content to provide “a summary of various international issues and a sample of the seminal contributions of McMaster’s global footprint,” the updated *Compendium* will recognize that in the intervening years internationalization in higher education has come to mean much more than simply the incorporation of “international content, materials and activity in the delivery of services.”²

That last sentence is not intended to minimize the importance of the range of activities the 2009 *Compendium* sought to document. Indeed, to cultivate international perspectives in the curriculum, to adduce and examine evidence of global provenance, and to encourage international mobility of students and faculty: these are activities natural and proper to any university worthy of the name, and together they ought to make universities enemies to parochialism everywhere in the world.

The *globalization* of higher education, which was noted in the 2009 report but which has accelerated dramatically in the intervening years, is a very different thing—a trend which brings considerations of ethics and global justice into the orbit of universities as never before. To the extent that it is characterized by the cross-border marketing of national “brands” in teaching and learning, and is not understood to imply a reimagining of national identities, globalized higher education paradoxically represents a new parochialism—not surprisingly unable to justify the claims made for it as a means of cultivating global citizenship because in many cases it exists to strengthen the economic advantage of the exporting nation.

¹ *McMaster University International Compendium*, June 2009, iii.

² Recommendations Report, pp. 8 and 11.

In a further paradox, the emerging global hegemony of certain educational models—western, Anglophone, industrial, for example—is beginning to homogenize the international landscape and to erode if not eliminate desirable cultural and other differences. Making the parochial universal: this is therefore one of the real risks of globalization in the university sector, especially when in developed countries the enterprise may be driven by largely economic motives.

The 2012 report of the Advisory Panel on Canada’s International Education Strategy confirms our country’s participation in this trend. With a mandate “to make recommendations on a strategy to maximize economic opportunities for Canada,” the panel’s report, *International Education: A Key Driver of Canada’s Future Prosperity* could devote very few of its nearly one hundred pages to the issues—the educational, research and cultural goals—which would normally command our attention as educators. The Government of Canada’s International Education Strategy is situated squarely as a “key element of . . . (its) Global Markets Action Plan,”³ and while we would not disparage the desire to maximize economic opportunities for this country, it remains the responsibility of educators and educational institutions to ensure that any commodification of what we do does not eclipse its formative, developmental and pedagogical *raison d’être*. The latter we must also take care to ensure is not vitiated by unscrutinized chauvinism—by the assumption that the world will be better by being more Canadian.

Government reminds us that we do our work in a “highly competitive, knowledge-based global economy,”⁴ and in that context it is obvious that universities will need to be both increasingly scrupulous in safeguarding the integrity of the academic mission and deliberate and astute in their negotiation of commercial realities. At present neither of these ambitions is realizable except in relation to the other, and neither will lead to success outside of a thoughtful and comprehensive strategy for international engagement. To develop the latter has been the goal of ongoing discussions on campus over the last two years, and in part it was the mission of the *Forward With Integrity* (FWI) Task Force on Internationalization that tabled its discussion paper in May, 2012.

Central to the recommendations of the Task Force⁵ was the assertion that McMaster should pursue a transformational model, an approach to global engagement that acknowledges that with meaningful internationalization will come far-reaching changes to McMaster itself. Within the institution, such an approach is in many ways the opposite of what, at the national level, I earlier described as “making the parochial universal.” Pointing out that the transformational model “provides both a definition of internationalization and guiding principles that enable global citizenship,” the Task Force went on to identify several strategies “to increase McMaster’s profile on the international stage and to ensure that every student at McMaster is exposed to international perspectives.” Further, the recommendation was for a “multi-dimensional

³ *Canada’s International Education Strategy: Harnessing our knowledge advantage to drive innovation and prosperity* (Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, 2014), 4.

⁴ *Canada’s International Education Strategy*, 4.

⁵ *Forward With Integrity Internationalization Task Force Position Paper*, 4 May 2012.

approach,” including “bedrock” measures to foster global citizenship, “student recruitment and exchanges, collaboration, capacity building or developing intercultural knowledge.”⁶

While acknowledging that international education today is inextricably woven into global commerce, the Task Force sought to advance a “value-added” view, sensitive and responsive to a more profound understanding of our obligations as educators, researchers, students, and citizens of the world. Three points were given to summarize McMaster’s motive and driving force as an international university:

1. Cooperation for peaceful coexistence and mutual benefit.
2. International demand for the University’s expertise in research and education.
3. The “civic mission” of the University.

With Dr. Peter Mascher’s appointment as Associate Vice-President (International Affairs), the University has begun to make the structural and strategic changes required to advance this “value-added” approach to internationalization. Critical in the new arrangement will be a pan-university International Strategy Advisory Group (ISAG), chaired by Dr. Mascher and reporting to the President, which will henceforth address the need for coordination and planning in this area. The Task Force recommended creation of a Centre for Global Engagement to perform this function, and probably over time, with the multiplication and diversification of global engagements, the ISAG will evolve in that direction.

The ISAG will bring together graduate, undergraduate and research matters⁷ and do its work in a notional space between the portfolios of the Provost and the Vice-President (Research and International Affairs) (VPRIA). A restructured Office of International Affairs (OIA) will be a resource and support to the ISAG and will continue to facilitate exchange agreements, establish institutional linkages and coordinate externally funded international projects and programs—all, however, subject to guidance from the ISAG, which will in turn seek endorsement of its approach from the President, Vice-President and Deans group (PVPD), established two years ago on a recommendation of the *Forward With Integrity* Advisory Group. International student recruiting will be brought under the responsibilities of the Provost.

The global standing of a university is not the sum of its student exchange agreements and international research collaborations, however critical those two elements will always be. It is also not entirely measurable in the number of visa students the university welcomes each year, or guaranteed by the volume of rhetoric on its website about global engagement. At McMaster we must continue to aspire to a more profound vision: to be an institution that is global in impact, that addresses through its research the great challenges of humanity without overlooking their local manifestations, and which seeks to educate students in all subjects so as to acknowledge the interconnectedness of all disciplines and all peoples.

⁶ 4.

⁷ The ISAG will include the AVP (Students and Learning) and Dean of Students, the AVP and Dean of Graduate Studies, the AVP (Global Health), the AVP (Faculty), a representative of the University Research Council, a representative of University Advancement/Alumni Relations, and up to three faculty members at large.

That there are important connections to be acknowledged and developed between international and local community engagement was an important assertion of the FWI Advisory Group in its report, *The Emerging Landscape*, which appeared in July 2012. Amongst the flagship recommendations of that report was a proposal to bring international and community initiatives administratively together in an Office of Community and Global Engagement. Although premised on real and important congruencies between the two areas, this arrangement was envisaged as transitional, pending a decision “on the intended prominence of internationalization as a defining feature of the institution” and on development of an academic vision for an internationalized McMaster.

As is obvious from the earlier part of this update, the question of whether or not the University should accord prominence to internationalization is by now moot. Circumstances, as well as our longstanding determination to be an institution of global standing, now dictate that we must make the nature, quality and extension of our international engagement a priority concern. And notwithstanding the self-evident truth that we meet the world in our own backyard, the decision has been made not to conflate our administrative supports for global and local engagement, but instead to modify what is already in place for the former and to establish a separate and appropriate structure for the latter.

What this decision says about internationalization applies equally to community engagement: both are critical pillars of our mission, both enjoy a fairly recent urgency and importance in the academy, and in neither case is there a longstanding or proven best model for their support and advancement within the university. In each case, whatever structure is put in place must be recognized as provisional and capable of evolving as strategic decisions are prosecuted.

What is being planned to support a renewed and reconceived approach to internationalization we have been able to build on existing central structures. In the case of community engagement, however, the challenge has been to imagine what structure would be appropriate and most sustaining for research and pedagogical work that has until recently been if not informal, then at least supported largely at the local department or faculty level, and somewhat outside the umbrella of the university’s declared priorities.

Following on from the 2012 position paper of the Community Engagement Task Force as well as *The Emerging Landscape*, this year has seen the establishment of the Network for Community Campus Partnerships, which brings together individuals representing all areas of campus to discuss issues critical to the success of the community engagement (CE) activities of the University. This vibrant, committed group has been meeting to advance our CE goals, and is currently focused on several priority areas: enabling community engaged education, providing recognition to those who foster CE, establishing resources and infrastructure to support CE activities and facilitating linkages between and among our internal and external communities.

The network model has emerged naturally as an expression of the values and academic orientation of the individuals involved in community engaged research and teaching, and as such it has immense value and needs to be retained. But at the same time we need to find a way to integrate the network into existing university structures so as to ensure its long-term

sustainability and facilitate its deeper penetration across disciplines and programs. How shall we bring community engagement into the centre of our academic life without losing the particular kind of dynamism and humane responsiveness that tends to thrive on the margins of any institution?

That question has been discussed in various arenas over the last several months, and a provisional model for governance and administration of CE at McMaster has now been put into place. Reporting to the AVP (Faculty), a new Director of Community Engagement will provide leadership to the Network and will be buttressed by administrative support, the model for which is currently being finalized. As in the case of internationalization, we need to establish an approach to CE that is transformational—not only of the community of which we are a part, but also of the institution itself. I wrote in *FWI* that “rather than relegate community engagement to the status of a ‘free-floating add-on,’ something we do on our own time, we need to integrate it fully and meaningfully into the work of the academy—into our normal activities of exploration, questioning and synthesizing, and subject to the most rigorous academic values.” Now that the interim governance and administration has been established, I expect we will see that process of integration speed up considerably.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Patrick Deane', written in black ink.

Patrick Deane
President and Vice-Chancellor
April 2014