



Université de Sherbrooke: Students, professors and researchers come out ahead in the field of cooperation

Strategy for North-South engagement

According to the international section of the Université de Sherbrooke's 2006-10 strategic plan, a university's level of internationalization not only impacts heavily upon its national and international reputation, it is also a deciding factor when choosing an institution to pursue one's studies.

The international section of the strategic plan stipulates that internationalization must be implemented in all sectors of the institution: recruitment and student life, teaching, research, university administration, and community services. However, there are many challenges to achieving this, such as acquiring a good understanding of other cultures and coordinating internationalization activities on campus. Seven strategic directions have therefore been developed, including one related to cooperation for development. In this regard, the Université de Sherbrooke is committed to providing funds that support and promote international development projects.

Implementation: Leveraging success

In practice, a few groups of researchers and professors within the faculties have excellent partnerships with organizations in the South. Among them, the Institut de recherche et d'éducation pour les coopératives et les mutuelles de l'Université de Sherbrooke (IRECUS) has stood out for its partnerships with the South and its impact on the internationalization of the Université de Sherbrooke.

Founded in 1976, IRECUS supports the university's internationalization strategy by ensuring that most activities in the education, research and international programs sectors have an international focus. These international activities mainly promote cooperation with developing countries. IRECUS offers researchers, professors and students the opportunity to participate in projects with organizations from the South. For the past 15 years, IRECUS has been carrying out multiple international cooperation projects with partner universities in Latin America and Africa.

It is thanks to IRECUS that the Université de Sherbrooke is among the top Canadian universities in terms of obtaining the highest number of University Partnerships in Cooperation and Development¹ (UPCD) projects (11 in total, six of which are IRECUS), demonstrating a high level of competency and success in creating partnerships with

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

countries in the South. By enabling professors from different faculties to spend time teaching abroad, IRECUS contributes to the professional development of the university's faculty.

The advantages of IRECUS' internationalization efforts are not limited to faculty; students also benefit. The masters in management and development of cooperatives, offered by IRECUS, focuses on the management of cooperatives and international development. Each year, students enrolled in this program gain from work-study training abroad. This program exposes students to the diversity of cultures and practices from around the world, preparing them for the cross-cultural nature of modern working environments.



IRECUS student David Baril with a group of Mexican women during his 2007 internship.

Photo: IRECUS, Université de Sherbrooke

Innovative features and programs

IRECUS has established several cooperative networks, including UniRcoop. For the past 10 years, this network has brought together 22 universities from 15 countries in the Americas which specialize in studies in cooperation. The network allows researchers, professors and students of member universities to carry out joint applied research activities, to ensure the training of members, to discuss their experiences, to take part in internships abroad and to participate in international symposiums.

Sonia Lopez, a student at Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, in Colombia, shares the significance of her experience with the network: "My participation in the UniRcoop workshop at the [Université de] Sherbrooke has brought me so much. I met many people who, like me, are working on the topic of economic solidarity. I discovered different tools, learned different models. I was also able to establish connections with others, and we now exchange emails regarding our research."²

These partnerships could not exist without the support of sponsors. In fact, UniRcoop was created in 2002, thanks to a \$5-million grant, spread over five years, from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). Several other sponsors contributed to IRECUS' projects, but it was projects from the UPCD program, administered by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada and financed by CIDA, that had the greatest impact.

The UPCD program funds collaboration projects between Canadian universities and higher learning institutions in developing countries. The program aims to strengthen the capacity of these establishments while securing lasting human resources that will address their countries' most pressing concerns. Over 100 projects have been funded worldwide in areas such as health, governance, the environment, food safety and the natural and social sciences.

IRECUS' vision regarding partnerships with organizations from the South rests upon a relationship of mutual trust through effective sharing of decision-making powers and respective responsibilities. This egalitarian relationship defines the strength of partnerships between the Institut and organizations in the South, and is a successful model from which all Canadian universities can learn.

² *Une vision humaine du développement des Amériques*, [enregistrement DVD], Québec, Reflet Vidéo, 2007.