



## University of Guelph: International engagement is in our DNA

### Strategy for North-South engagement

Part of the University of Guelph's (U of G) heritage includes its leadership in international cooperation. Its Centre for International Programs, established in 1967, was the first of its kind in Canada. The centre's mission is to provide guidance and expertise in facilitating international academic activities to support the university's strategic direction in internationalization. The centre also fosters international learning among faculty and students in order to stimulate a sense of partnership and global responsibility.

Through both its central international office, and its mainstreaming approach, the U of G provides an interesting example of experimentation with administrative structure to support internationalization. Guelph derives its innovative legacy from its founders, the Ontario Veterinary College, the Macdonald Institute and the Ontario Agricultural College, going back to 1874. While the U of G's curriculum now encompasses the arts, humanities, physical and natural sciences, and social sciences, there is a commitment to interdisciplinary programs, and it retains a special focus on agri-food and veterinary medicine.

In the fall of 2010, the U of G's senate approved an internationalization strategy to formalize its commitment to international engagement. Given the breadth and depth of the institution's development activities, one of the main challenges was to capture the scope of its work.

### Implementation: Drawing on champions

The importance of "champions" for Guelph's internationalization and its international development has been key. Strong leaders, particularly the university's many dynamic and creative faculty members, have been at the forefront of various development projects including those in Ghana, Botswana, and Brazil. This potent combination has played a significant part in the evolution of the U of G's internationalization.

"The power of the individual" is a phrase often cited in reference to President Alastair Summerlee's unflagging support of internationalization. Then there's Jim Shute, a faculty member for 36 years, who spent the last 10 years of his career as director of the Centre for International Programs and left a considerable footprint on campus. He was the source of inspiration for many faculty and administrators to engage internationally. Made a professor emeritus in 2001, Dr. Shute's vision of the international office was of it being like a "switch board" to connect various people on campus, while constantly raising general awareness of ongoing initiatives. The current structure now has Serge Desmarais, associate vice-president, academic, as the point person.

The U of G has also been at the forefront of international development studies, with interdisciplinary programs that

include a collaborative master-level program and a new PhD program. At the undergraduate level, international development is offered as a specialization within a bachelor of arts degree or as a minor to complement a major in another discipline, and draws widely on existing courses across the curriculum. Sally Humphries, director of international development studies, says she sees this as strength because it exposes students to several disciplines.

The university is currently exploring ways to incorporate global citizenship, or “worldmindedness,” across the curriculum for all students. One option, spearheaded by the provost’s office, is working to establish a certificate in community engagement and global citizenship similar to Guelph’s existing undergraduate certificate in leadership. At the same time, the U of G is looking at how to provide credit for experiences such as international service learning.

To address the important question of liabilities related to international activities, Lynne Mitchell, director of U of G’s Centre for International Programs, has co-authored a publication for Canadian international educators, *Risk Sense: Developing and Managing International Education Activities with Risk in Mind*. In it, she and co-author, Wayne Myles, underscore the benefits of international experience, and how to manage risk while doing so. (See [www.risksense.ca](http://www.risksense.ca))

## Innovative features and programs

A new chair at the U of G promotes environmental and governance practices that support sustainability through

a \$1-million gift from Canada’s Kinross Gold Corp. Unlike traditional research chairs, the Kinross Chair in Environmental Governance will be held by a succession of high-profile experts in the field rather than by a single academic scholar. According to Kinross’s president and CEO Tye Burt, new forms of collaboration and leadership are required to build global connections among citizens, government and industry, especially in terms of environmental changes. One activity arising from this collaboration is in Brazil, where eligible students of soils and tropical ecosystems can receive funding at the undergraduate level for graduate training, as well as for seed money for research.

Several faculty members underline the importance of building mutually beneficial partnerships. Stefan Kycia, assistant professor, department of physics, stresses that many Southern partners are on the cutting edge of science, including in Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Mexico and South Africa. Researchers, too, point out that many research questions are fundamentally international in scope. Richard Heck, associate professor, department of soils and landscape processes, says it is very important to engage young international researchers given that they “constitute the future of international research networks.”

In 2005, David Waltner-Toews, professor, population medicine faculty, was one of the founders of the non-governmental organization, Veterinarians without Borders (VWB), which complements faculty research activities while offering services to communities. Further, VWB’s existence has facilitated opportunities for research implementation and evaluation in countries such as Kenya, Uganda and Malawi, reflecting Dr. Waltner-Toews’ belief in “the need to be more interdisciplinary, more engaged with civil society.”

Another partnership of over 40 years exists in West Africa, where, according to Daniel Hormeku, assistant registrar, international programmes at the University of Ghana, “the University of Guelph has helped make the University of Ghana more international.” The partnership is a testimony to the importance of internationalization and international collaboration, and has helped the University of Ghana take its own steps in developing its internationalization strategy.”

The U of G’s experience has provided fertile ground for experimentation in how North-South partnerships support internationalization. Its innovation and the plethora of opportunities for students and faculty continue to make it an inspiring and robust model.



Gard Otis encourages active, participatory learning by farmers at bee hives in Vietnam, part of a development project from the University of Guelph.

Photo: University of Guelph