

REFLECTIONS FROM ROUND TABLE 10

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INTERNATIONALIZING THE UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA

INTRODUCTION

The University of Ottawa, like other Canadian institutions of higher education, was established during a period when it was anticipated that most graduates would spend their careers working in the Canadian context. Today this is no longer true.

As a result of the growth and worldwide expansion of communications technologies, massive international migration, and the opportunity for rapid and cheap travel to other parts of the world, most aspects of life in Canada must now be seen from an international or global perspective. The recent SARS and West Nile health crises, the current increase in gasoline prices, the impact of corporate corruption on the stock market, among other factors, all demonstrate the extent to which global issues have also become local issues.

Consequently, the University of Ottawa must prepare even those students who plan to live and work in Canada to be aware of and understand the weighty influences from other parts of the world. At the same time, on a global level, Canada is repositioning itself, putting renewed emphasis on its traditional role as a peace broker and international negotiator. What's more, the Canadian economy is becoming increasingly internationalized, so much so that right now one of every three jobs is related to the export sector. All of this will require larger and larger pools of well-trained, multi-lingual, internationally knowledgeable employees.

Canadian universities are attracting more interest than ever before among foreign students. Since the events of September 11, 2001, foreign-student enrollments in American universities have plummeted. Before 2001, international students were contributing \$11 billion annually to the American economy. However, more stringent visa requirements and generally less open attitudes towards foreign students (e.g. a National Commission recently recommended that the course work of all foreign students be monitored) have made the United States a less desirable destination for many students.

Because of its location in Canada's capital, the University of Ottawa already enjoys a strategic advantage. This, coupled with the University's bilingual capacity, has put it in a unique position to respond quickly and effectively to these changes. Moreover, given the current concerns over global security, students need more than ever before to be trained in issues of human rights, legal rights, cultural diversity, and conflict resolution. The University has a long-standing reputation for excellence in these areas.

Traditionally, the University of Ottawa, like other universities, has performed three key functions: i) Education/Teaching; ii) Research; and iii) Service to the Community. These continue to stand as beacons for understanding the mission and function of the University. Below we present thoughts and recommendations on how the University could enhance its international perspective in these three areas.

EDUCATION

Teaching from an international perspective includes a commitment not only to the needs of Canadian students (ensuring that they acquire the skills to live productive lives in an increasingly globalized society), but also to the needs of our growing number of foreign students. For instance, efforts must be made to ensure that international students are well integrated into both the scholarly and social life of the University. International students are an immense resource, and their knowledge, skills and culture should be regarded as an asset. We now have 125 countries represented in our student body.

Whether students are Canadian or foreign, there is an increased likelihood that they will find employment anywhere in the world, and part of our mission must be to prepare them for this new reality. What's more, graduates of the University of Ottawa form a valuable pool of potential promoters of the University in Canada and abroad.

In this context, the University of Ottawa already has a strategic advantage in its bilingual character, offering a full slate of courses in two important international languages. Moreover, it can be argued that this linguistic facility gives the University openness towards the use of other languages, along with a certain agility that cannot readily be matched by unilingual institutions. Also, the multicultural nature of the student body, which extends well beyond the francophone/anglophone community, provides a powerful springboard for action.

A starting point for the internationalization of the University must be to ensure that all academic programs are taught from an international perspective, to the extent possible. Professors should be encouraged to give examples from other countries or cultures, to cite literature and research from outside Canada (as well as from Canada), and to encourage students to share their own non-Canadian perspectives where applicable and appropriate. Each faculty and department should ensure that its curriculum is adapted to the new reality of globalization.

The University already is developing a student exchange program at the undergraduate level. The benefits of this program include acquainting students with new cultures and languages. Exchange programs are thus important instruments for furthering the internationalization of our academic programs. We should also develop a Study Abroad program by which students would take University of Ottawa courses outside Canada. This would be particularly useful for students in programs that have an international component. One approach might be to open field schools where professors take a group of students abroad to study a particular topic for a specific time. For example, a religious studies class might spend time visiting antiquities in the Middle East; a Latin American history class might spend time visiting archaeological sites in Mexico or Peru; a biology or environmental sciences class might visit the Galapagos Islands; a civil engineering class might visit major world dams; an international development class might undertake a field seminar on the development of a particular country. Equally important are opportunities for faculty members to participate in exchanges with colleagues abroad.

We could heighten the international visibility and outreach of the University of Ottawa by running programs in partnership with highly regarded sister institutions elsewhere in the world. We should take advantage of new communications and distance-education technologies to build such partnerships and to enhance our reputation as an institution that is both forward looking and open to the world.

To date, the University of Ottawa's track record in attracting foreign graduate students, except in engineering and information, hasn't been stellar. Concerted efforts should be made to increase the number of foreign graduate students in all parts of the University. One approach might be to design joint-diploma programs with foreign partner universities.

RESEARCH

The relationship between research and internationalization of the University is slightly problematic. On the one hand, if the University wants to enhance its international academic reputation, it is wise to do so through the normally accepted channels (publication in prestigious journals, participation in research with famous universities, etc.) However, if we want to become more involved in international-development work through cooperation, studies and research, then we may have to step outside the traditional framework of academic excellence. This committee believes the University of Ottawa should pursue both objectives simultaneously and properly recognize staff in both streams.

The University of Ottawa has a strong corps of active researchers, and the work of some faculty members is known worldwide. However, we can still improve and expand on this base. At some levels, much of the research carried out by faculty members is international only in that it involves other scholars and practitioners in the area of interest. However, many scholars have a specific interest in international research

whether in law, health sciences and medicine, language and literature, or social sciences, etc. Currently the University has no means of drawing together these individuals, i.e. there is no single institution or centre designed to link students and scholars in a multidisciplinary setting. Many universities have had considerable success in establishing centres for international studies. For example, Harvard University's Center for International Development has associates from throughout the University, and they run a lively program of visiting speakers and research projects. The University of Ottawa needs a physical location with virtual support to inform both the university community and the general public about international research and activities.

Therefore, we recommend the establishment of a Centre for International Research (CIR) to undertake two prime activities. The first would be to serve as a focal point for all international research carried out at the University. The second would be to fulfill an information role, creating and maintaining a Web site that lists international meetings, publications, visitors, etc. The role of the Centre *would not be to supervise* international research being done by University faculty, but rather to provide them with an audience for their work and to ensure this work is announced regularly and at just the right time. This would benefit not only the researchers themselves but also the overall reputation of the University. The Centre would also organize regular conferences and speaker programs. Ideally, it would host a prestigious international conference every year. The Institute of Canadian Studies at the University of Ottawa already provides an excellent model, which could be followed. The proposed CIR would also establish ties with the diplomatic community and with parliamentarians, providing them with an opportunity to speak at the University or even teach there.

Another way of enhancing the international reputation of the University is to partner with reputable international organizations. In this context, it may be possible to establish one or two UNESCO chairs. Preliminary discussions with UNESCO show that a proposal for a chair in translation and a chair in the social impact of science would be well received. Unfortunately, the University would have to provide the financing, but this might work within the framework of the overall financial strategy.

Hiring and promotion decisions for academic staff are of course the responsibility of different faculties and departments; however, if at a corporate level the University wants to promote participation in multidisciplinary research projects, perhaps with institutions in developing countries, then faculties and departments should be encouraged to look favourably on such activities when they make their hiring and promotion decisions.

To date, research with such institutions and publication in journals from developing countries has not been valued. Moreover, funding institutions have their own agendas and requirements, and these often conflict with the values of the University. Given this reality, we should explore alternative ways of finding financial support for joint research with partners from developing countries.

Finally, if the University wants to polish its international reputation, it should encourage faculty members and graduate students to present papers at international meetings. This means providing larger international travel grants.

SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY

In most universities, there is a certain lack of continuity between the education/research mission and the “service to the community” mission. Frequently, faculty time spent in this area doesn’t garner much recognition. The committee believes that service to the community can be a driving force in the University’s quest to further internationalize its scope. Specifically, this may involve the participation of staff in international development projects. Of course, this can make the University better known beyond national borders; but it also gives a higher profile to the University domestically as an “international player.” Any serious effort to heighten the profile of the University of Ottawa must include such an international dimension. However, if faculty who spend time in such projects are seen as “poor producers” in terms of research, then it obviously isn’t in their best interest to stay involved in the area. This is a strategic issue that warrants in-depth discussion by University administrators.

At the same time, faculty members who do private consulting are encouraged to identify themselves as University of Ottawa staff. This too will provide additional recognition to the University and thus contribute to our branding efforts.

Academic staff becomes involved with international service to the community for varying reasons. Some operate primarily within the narrow bureaucratic frameworks of specifically assigned tasks, while others have a purely altruistic approach and give freely of themselves and their personal time.

One of the quickest and most obvious links with the community, including the international community, is through University of Ottawa alumni, who are indeed a key resource for the University of Ottawa. They are potential partners and promoters (and even financial donors), but the University currently does a poor job of keeping track of alumni. Foreign alumni are also a strong catalyst for the University’s outreach. Many University of Ottawa graduates have stepped into prominent positions in their home countries, as political figures, media people, highly regarded professionals, etc.

One important service the University of Ottawa provides to the community is expert commentary for the media on issues of the day. The University should therefore strive to sell our expertise not only on domestic issues, but also on international issues and on the international aspects of domestic issues.

Finally, as already mentioned in the discussion of the Centre for International Research, we recommend that the University of Ottawa establish a community-focused Web site on current issues and international affairs.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our recommendations revolve around the three functions of the University:

- i) Education/teaching
- ii) Research and contribution to knowledge
- iii) Community service

We also have indicated whether our recommendations can be carried out in the short term, the medium term or the long term. Short term would be within a year, medium term would be within three years, and long term would be in 5 or more years.

Education/teaching

Short term

1. The University should encourage all academic units to internationalize their curriculums to the extent feasible.
2. The University must have a uniform policy for the treatment of all students, both Canadian and foreign. This includes issues of access to campus housing, co-op programs, bursaries and scholarships, and all other opportunities.
3. The University should establish a program of scholarships and bursaries aimed directly at attracting highly qualified and gifted foreign students. The program should have a specific name, for instance, University of Ottawa Scholar or something similar, to give it additional prestige. (If we could find a donor, the scholarship could carry the name of that person, that is, University of Ottawa XXXX Scholar.)
4. The University should develop a series of support programs to help international students adapt to the academic and social life of the University. Included would be a “Buddy” program where Canadian volunteers are assigned to assist international students and give them general information about life on campus and in Canada.
5. The University should more openly recognize and value the fact that foreign students make up 5-6% of its student body; and it should use this reality as a springboard for developing intercultural communications on campus. (Short to medium term.)
6. The University should heighten its presence at key international student recruitment fairs and at other events that will help showcase it as a major academic institution. Two important examples include the Association of

International Educators (NAFSA) meeting in the U.S. and the European Association for International Education conference, which is held annually in Europe. Further efforts should also be made in Asia.

7. The University should build a more systematic database of alumni and strive to trace and keep track of international graduates.
8. The University should tap into the latest technologies to have prominent academics elsewhere deliver virtual lectures in Ottawa.

Medium term

9. The University should develop a “Study Abroad” program, which could include field schools that allow students to spend a semester or a summer abroad in a program of studies.
10. The University should explore the establishment of “double diplomas” in cooperation with other highly regarded academic institutions worldwide.

Research and Contribution to Knowledge

Short Term

1. The University should, as part of its Centre for International Research, create a Web site or virtual information centre on international academic affairs. The site would publicize what is already being done and include a list of all international-related publications by its professors.
2. The University should encourage its faculties to increase access to international travel grants for academic staff members and ensure that international travel is properly valued by all academic units. Similarly, the University should set aside central funds for this purpose.
3. The University should encourage academic units to value multi-disciplinary and collaborative research in addition to valuing publication in journals from developing countries.
4. The University should encourage research partnerships with foreign academic institutions, including institutions based in the South.
5. The University should explore the establishment of UNESCO Research Chairs.
6. The University should create better links with the diplomatic community. One approach would be to sponsor a series of ambassador lectures.

7. The University should create links with parliamentarians and senior public servants on international issues.

Medium Term

8. The University should establish a Centre for International Research to act as a focal point for international research and teaching.

Community Service

Short Term

1. The University should value professors' involvement in international projects and encourage partnerships with practice-oriented institutions.
2. The University should organize regular public events that inform the community on some aspect of current international issues. Students, including foreign students, should be key participants.
3. The University should establish a Web site for the community, highlighting the international activities of the University of Ottawa.

Medium term

4. The University should establish a database of faculty members, including recently retired ones, who may be interested in undertaking short assignments abroad and build a network with Canadian embassies all over the world alerting them to the potential for the University to offer short (1-2 week) training programs, on-site.

RESOURCES

Many of our recommendations require little or no additional funding, but they do require policy commitment on the part of the University of Ottawa. We recognize that the establishment of a Centre for International Research does have financial implications, but the huge benefits justify implementing this recommendation as soon as possible. It would become the flagship for the University of Ottawa's internationalization project.

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