



Saint Mary's University: Student-centred internationalization

Strategy for North-South engagement

Saint Mary's University (SMU) recognizes the importance of fostering strong partnerships. SMU's North-South engagement is focused on a handful of countries where it has earned a reputation for commitment as a competent partner. In order to do this, SMU has contributed significantly to higher education, social development, environmental protection and private sector development.

Internationalization at SMU is both a bottom-up and a top-down process. It is simultaneously driven by faculty members and students, as well as the international activities office and deans. Outstanding faculty members such as Drs. Dong, Conrad, Broders and Borrás drive much of the engagement with Southern partners. SMU acknowledges university administration has an important role to play in facilitating these efforts if it is to meet its student mobility targets and retain its reputation as an internationalized institution.

SMU's international coordination committee works out how to better support and enable faculty to be more involved around the world. The committee is addressing the long-standing question of how to incorporate international service work into tenure and promotion. Alain Boutet, then-director of the international activities office, says "[the] profile of new faculty is changing; it is not the same as 25 to 30 years ago. They have travelled; they have a global vision." Dr. Boutet notes

that continuing to engage faculty with international opportunities will ultimately improve the overall learning experience for SMU students.

Since 1979, SMU has been actively providing international exposure and education to the Halifax and greater Nova Scotia community by disseminating cultural information engaging with immigrant support groups and community associations, such as the Nova Scotia Gambia Association. SMU faculty also reach out to communities worldwide. For example, Canada Research Chair Saturnino Jun Borrás links his scientific research with political activism to secure land rights in Latin America and Asia through his leadership of an initiative on land deal politics.

Implementation: Leveraging success

In order to produce global citizens, SMU considers it a responsibility to provide students with international opportunities. Faculty incorporates international learning into curricula to allow students to share in international experiences and gain cross-cultural understanding. Biology professor Hugh Broders' teaching method regularly draws on his field research in Belize, Taiwan and China. "Professors... should have these experiences so that [they] can bring them back into the classroom," he says.

Since 1996, through working with University Partnerships in Cooperation and Development (UPCD), a program

funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and managed by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), SMU was a key partner in the establishment of the University of the Gambia, the country's first university. Since that time, SMU has been engaged in a number of ongoing projects in the Gambia, and has made a significant contribution to the development of a higher education system in the country. In partnership with three other Atlantic Canadian universities, SMU led the \$7-million Tier 1 UPCD¹ community-based conservation management project in China and Vietnam. This project introduced cutting-edge interdisciplinary approaches to environmental and natural resource management. SMU also conducted a gender and cross-cultural program in China, as well as a Canada-China language and cultural training program. As testament to its strong Chinese linkages, 50 percent of SMU's international student body are Chinese.

The SMU Sobey School of Business has recently begun a \$5-million Tier 1 UPCD project to develop entrepreneurship in Vietnam, which builds on its work in a former Tier 2 UPCD project from the mid-1990s. Pham Hong Chuong heads the department of research management at the National Economic University (NEU), the Vietnamese partner for the two projects. According to Dr. Chuong, the partnership with SMU has been a catalyst for policy engagement within Vietnam, connecting NEU with such institutions as the Ministry of Education and Training and the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry. As a result of the academic, administrative and research capacity building from the SMU partnership, "NEU is capable [of] upgrad[ing] its existing [business] programs (bachelors, masters, short-term training) to meet international standards," says Dr. Chuong. He emphasizes that "in [NEU's] perception, Canadian universities are of very high standard and reputation." The SMU-NEU partnership continues to grow and evolve and will bring ongoing benefit to both partners.

International development projects ultimately translate into enhanced quality of learning in the classroom for SMU students. Maureen Woodhouse of the international activities office says participation in UPCD projects "gets professors out there to places that they might not otherwise go... it does bring something different into the classroom."

Both on and off campus, SMU is committed to outreach. "Students for Development Pitchers and Pictures," coordinated by the geography department, is a fun and interactive event for students and faculty to share their research experiences with others. Once a month, professors and students gather at the campus pub to present photo slide shows and share stories.²



UPCD partners from Mongolia and SMU visit an open pit mine in Mongolia.

Photo: Saint Mary's University

Innovative features and programs

SMU puts students at the centre of its internationalization efforts. Its targeted percentage of incoming international students is 20 percent and 5 percent for outgoing international student mobility. Already, SMU has nearly achieved its incoming international student target, with approximately 1,500 of the student body hailing from 90 different countries around the world. In pursuit of its outgoing student mobility target – which is nearly double the Canadian average of 2.8 percent – SMU is focused on offering students an abundance of creative international opportunities. Speaking about international mobility, geography professor Cathy Conrad said it "is not something that is just written about in a glossy brochure; it is actually happening here."

Engagement in Southern countries has fostered the development of new interdisciplinary courses on campus. One such course was conceived out of faculty collaboration

¹ The program has two tiers: Tier 1 funds large multi-disciplinary projects to which CIDA contributes up to \$3 million over six years; Tier 2 funds smaller and more narrowly focused projects, to which CIDA contributes up to \$1 million over six years. Tier 1 projects are managed by CIDA whereas Tier 2 projects are managed by AUCC.

² For more information about the Students for Development program, please see www.aucc.ca/sfd.

in Taiwan. The “ecosystems” course is a joint initiative of the environmental science, biology and geography departments.

Looking ahead, the international development studies program is working on a new PhD program. SMU would then be able to offer the first doctorate in international development studies in Canada.

SMU also recognizes the traditional model of outward student mobility is not sufficient to meet today’s demands. SMU boasts some innovative examples of student mobility models, which include:

- (i) An interdisciplinary field course in China, spearheaded by Zhongmin Dong, a joint initiative of the departments of biology, sociology and environmental sciences, in partnership with Shaanxi Normal University, China. Students conduct a three-week for-credit research project in China, in collaboration with Chinese peers.
- (ii) SMU students wanting to study internationally can apply for funding from a variety of sources. For example, every year, the Homburg International Mobility Awards provide eight scholarships of \$12,500 each to assist SMU students in their international learning/mobility.
- (iii) Through the CIDA-funded Citizen Science project, Dr. Conrad coordinated a video contest open to students from any discipline in 2009 and in 2010. The winning teams won a trip to the Gambia with Dr. Conrad where the students participated in various green mapping projects. Both the 2009 and 2010 teams produced a short documentary upon their return from the Gambia.³ The Citizen Science project allowed SMU to work closely with various community and student-led groups in Ecuador, the Gambia, Kenya, Mongolia and Vietnam on green mapping projects. SMU also sends many students abroad through the CIDA-funded Students for Development program that is managed by AUCC.

³ The winning contest videos can be viewed on SMU-Tube, a student public outreach website: www.smutube.ca/you.php.